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THE ARNCLIFFE PUZZLE

The Arncliffe Puzzle

By
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The Arncliffe Puzzle

CHAPTER I

LORD ARNCLIFFE CAUSES A DISPUTE

"AH!" said the fisherman, "I nearly had him that time!"

Perhaps the stolid "March Brown" at the end of the cast had dropped like a stone into the clear water. The whole bunch of flies might have fallen a trifle short. Or the shadow of the line as it sped over a sunlit space had flashed a warning to wary eyes. Whatever the explanation, the disastrous fact remained. A huge trout, feeding lazily at the head of the shallows, had darted silently up-stream, leaving a tempting array of "March Browns," "Black Gnats," and even a glittering "Greenman's Glory," to float back in a defeated tangle.

Although certain spasmodic wrigglings inside an ample pannier revealed that George Lester was a fisher of skill, it will be obvious to the sympathetic soul that the escaped leviathan was the trout of trouts, the two-pound monarch of the beck, the "wonder" of whose existence a beer-inspired poacher had hinted over-night in the sanded "bar"

of the Fisherman's Rest. Was it not at this precise spot that the man in a rabbit-skin cap had warned his new acquaintance to "keep an eye open for t' big 'un?" Had not the speckled beauty not only rewarded expectancy but actually curled its plump body into the sunlight to gobble a May-fly? And now it was a memory, a brown ghost hidden in the black depths beneath the hazels and the willows! Scoffers — those to whom a fish is a mere item on a menu — might marvel at the bitterness of the moment. Not so this fisherman, nor any other brother of the rod.

Lester recovered his flies and whipped his line clear. The wide-spreading pastures had narrowed thereabouts into a lovely dingle, and the sylvan mysteries of the rivulet were choked by a belt of solemn firs. Gruffly insistent, where fences on both sides ran into the willows, was a notice-board: "Trespassers will be prosecuted — By Order." He laughed.

"An educated fish, evidently," he murmured. "Here endeth the common right. Some bloated colliery magnate probably owns the neighboring property and that fish. What is the fine, I wonder? Forty shillings and costs? I'll pay so much cheerfully. But the local paper will publish the fell details. By Jove, what a change a month plus a mail-steamer can make! Wish I had this coal

merchant thigh-deep in the Banti swamp. He would give me the free run of his preserves for life to pull him out."

Consoled by the imaginary spectacle of a plethoric person in a frock-coat and a silk hat struggling through the hinterland of Ashanti, George Lester hitched the strap of his pannier out of a rut in his shoulder, laid the rod on the grass, and produced a pipe and tobacco-pouch. The mere thought of a smoke was so pleasing that he found himself indulging in the conceit that the trespass-forbidding ogre might be amenable to a polite request for permission to fish the protected waters.

And then, all unsuspected, the curtain rose on the great drama of his life.

Having lit his pipe, he disjointed the rod, and had turned to walk back to the village of Arncliffe and its comfortable inn, when a slight shriek broke the magic silence of the place. It appeared to come from the midst of the dense plantation. It was the cry of a woman in distress, and this young man was not of hesitating temperament under such conditions. Instantly he vaulted over a stout railing that closed a gap in the quick-set hedge and ran quickly through the trees, with eyes and ears intent.

The soft carpet provided by generations of fir spines rendered his passage almost noiseless. Once

within the cathedral aisle of the straight trunks he could see a considerable distance. Nothing was visible in the wood except the white tails of several scuttling rabbits and the golden-brown plumage of an alarmed pheasant. Hence he concluded that the scream must have come from the denser growth by the banks of the little river. He hurried on, soon discovering that the plantation narrowed during its descent of the steep sides of the valley. A vista of rolling park-land, studded with solitary oaks, clumps of elms, and groups of short-horned cattle gradually unfolded itself.

And now, in the angle formed by the fir-trees and the stream, he discerned a big straw hat covering a muslin dress. The wearer of these feminine accessories seemed to be greatly interested in some thrilling incident which was enacting itself in the water. An open sunshade, thrown heedlessly aside, and a book lying on the grass near a fallen tree, showed that a reader's solitude had been rudely disturbed.

Lester, climbing another fence, thought it best not to add to her alarm, whatever the cause, by appearing unexpectedly. So he shouted: "Don't be frightened! Can I help you?"

His first impression of the face suddenly turned toward him was that nature, playing one of her pranks in the staid North of England, had transported to that secluded spot a Frenchwoman of

Versailles, some charming Duchesse or Marquise such as Greuze loved to paint. There was a glimpse of Titian red hair framing an oval face, a hint of coral lips, a flash of eyes of myosotis blue. But instantly the vision was withdrawn, and a sweet voice wailed:

"Oh, it is too late!"

Lester was now near enough to witness the final act of a tragedy.

A full-grown dog otter was making off with his kill, a superb trout that could be none other than the poacher's "big 'un." A stream which yielded fish averaging six ounces in weight could not harbor two such monsters in one short reach. And there was the sleek thief vanishing silently with the prize, while the girl turned tear-dimmed eyes to the newcomer.

"How horrid!" she cried. "I was sitting here in absolute quiet when I heard a rush and a splash, and I saw that nasty otter spring after the fish. Poor thing! It tried to escape. But he turned over some large stones quite easily, and caught it."

"If there are no otter hounds in the neighborhood, the keepers should trap or shoot the brutes. They are perfect pests in a well-stocked river," said Lester.

"Lord Arncliffe will not permit anything on the estate to be killed."

"He ought to be told that by encouraging otters, weasels; stoats, and other destructive creatures, he is sanctioning wholesale murder, though indeed it is well not to push the theory too far, seeing that *lex talionis* is the law of nature."

"It may be; nevertheless I dislike such demonstrations. It has ruined my afternoon, and I am so sorry for the poor fish! Just imagine its feelings when it was pounced on by a fierce beast with sharp teeth and wicked eyes!"

Then the young woman became conscious that she was speaking thus impulsively to a stranger. Moreover, a squirm inside the creaking pannier revealed that the difference between man and otter, when equally intent on the capture of trout, would demand careful definition. Quick to interpret and anxious to remove the cause of her sudden embarrassment, Lester bent to recover the book and parasol. Being an observant person, he noted that the volume was a presentation copy of an irreproachable French novel, a rarity in itself. Nevertheless, being a man of candid humor, he protested against the girl's generic description of the angling tribe.

"My own want of skill alone saved the victim from earlier disaster," he said pleasantly. "Moreover, I saw him deliberately cut off a May-fly in its prime, so my sympathy rests chiefly with you, who were so disagreeably disturbed in this Arcady."

He was endowed with what his friends described as a "reassuring" smile. It won the goodwill of men, the confidence of women, and its present effect was to restore Miss Edith Holt to her normal mood of cheerful audacity. She glanced at his fishing equipment.

"You must not be caught poaching here," she said with a gravity belied by her eyes. "The plea that you are ignorant of the law will only enhance your punishment."

"My only offense is that I rushed to your assistance. Does the action constitute me a poacher? If so, I will suffer the penalty with Christian fortitude."

"How could you know what was going on unless you were in the wood?" said she, sticking to her text.

"Because you screamed."

"I am sure I did nothing of the sort. I never scream."

"Then we have provided a case worthy of the Psychical Research Society's records, for I was mysteriously influenced to jump two hedges and traverse the wood in your behalf."

"I must have scr — cried out more loudly than I fancied. And you reached me very quickly," she added hastily, conscious that this unknown and distinguished-looking young man better deserved her thanks than dire threats of the fishery laws.

He was tempted to seize the new opening and prolong the conversation, but there was an element of unfairness in taking advantage of the girl's confusion. When all was said and done, he was an interloper, and the first surprise of finding such a dainty divinity in that solitary nook was yielding to the surmise that he was addressing one who, in all probability, was the nineteenth-century goddess of Arncliffe Park.

So he lifted his hat with the polite ease of a man of the world.

"My excuse for intruding on your domain is that I thought my help was needed. Let me apologize for myself — and the otter."

"Indeed, I am very much obliged to you," she replied.

"And I to the otter," he could not resist saying, though now he was half-turned towards the wood.

"Hello, there! Stop! What are you doing here?" suddenly demanded a loud voice.

Neither Edith Holt nor her would-be protector had noticed the rapid approach of a stoutly built, bull-necked youngster of the country squire type, who was striding across the park in a violent hurry. Indeed, he had just ceased running. The exertion gave an apoplectic tinge to his red face and brought his skin into curious harmony with the vivid hue of his leather gaiters and tan-colored boots. The cut

of his clothes, the pattern of his waistcoat, the shape of his hat, bespoke a horsey individual. He carried a hunting-crop with a bone handle carved to represent a dog's head, while the gold pin in his hunting tie was fashioned as a fox at full gallop.

The manner of his coming no less than his peremptory hail was offensive. His attitude bespoke the outraged upholder of property rights. "Wait till I catch you, my fine fellow!" he seemed to say. "I'll teach you not to try your poaching tricks here!"

Lester, habited to classify mankind in the rough, likened the truculent newcomer to a savage chief who once waylaid him, unarmed, in the Ashanti bush, but who was incontinently put to flight when the Englishman, by a happy thought, planted the tripod of a camera before him and dived his head under the dark cloth. The warrior knew naught of photography, but once he had seen a Maxim gun in action — seen it from the front, too. The square black thing induced doubt. A flap of the cloth and a raised shutter caused the negro to fly with a yell. Lester wondered now what would happen if he charged the other man full tilt with his fishing-rod; but the girl gave a fresh turn to his thoughts by crying excitedly:

"Oh, Harry, I have had such a fright! I was sitting here reading when an otter caught a fish

almost at my feet. This gentleman heard me cry out and very kindly ran to my assistance."

"Indeed?"

"Harry" still snorted suspicion, and the glint of his light-blue eyes betokened that the well-set-up, gentlemanly aspect of the stranger was as little to his liking as the more distant semblance of a trespasser.

"Don't you understand? He was fishing the stream beyond the wood, and he was brought here by my very natural cry of alarm."

The smile had left the girl's face. It was succeeded by a flush of annoyance. Her voice too had a touch of petulance. Harry's *gauche* manner evidently irritated her. Why had he not accepted the explanation she tendered so readily?

"Beyond the wood, was he? All right. I hurried here to tell you that his lordship has been taken seriously ill. My mother is asking for you — Edith."

There was still an ungracious tone in the man's speech, and he dragged in the girl's Christian name with awkward effect.

Lester, unwilling that he should be the cause of a quarrel between two young people who were on such familiar terms, raised his hat again.

"I fear I am to blame for disregarding the notice-board," he said. "But I did not wait to

consider consequences. Happily, the affair is unimportant."

By this time the girl was hastening away, and Harry, apparently anxious to accompany her, thought fit to say, less roughly:

"Of course I didn't know what had happened. If you wish to avoid the wood you will find a path at the top of the hill. It leads direct to the village. Should any of the keepers meet you, say you were sent that way by Mr. Warren. Good-day!"

Lester, whose disposition was eminently placid, did as he was told. Relighting his pipe, he climbed the hill, and watched the fluttering muslin skirt and the red gaiters making rapid progress across the park. Above the soaring foliage of many elms he could now see the chimneys and gables of a large Elizabethan house.

"I am afraid my pretty little marquise and that half-educated clodhopper are pairing off," he mused. "How oddly humanity blunders at times! There should be a law to prevent such ill-matched sorting."

At that moment the "clodhopper" glanced back and his companion followed suit. Lester smiled good-humoredly.

"She is pitching into him for being rude to me," thought Lester, "and he is defending himself by explaining his extreme civility in telling me about

the path. Well, if it gratifies mademoiselle — for she is certainly of French descent, notwithstanding the Saxon sound of 'Edith' — I am glad I came this way."

He encountered no keeper. When he reached the village, the stout landlord of the "Fisherman's Rest," known to two generations of anglers as "Jolly Jim" Jones, greeted him at the door.

"Well, sir, what sport?"

"Excellent, with a catastrophe thrown in."

"What was thrown in, sir?"

"A young lady, not to mention a fierce beast with wicked eyes."

"By gum!" said the landlord, doubtful whether to believe the grave words or the laughing voice. Handing the laden pannier to a maid-servant, the fisherman became more explicit. Then Jones yielded information.

"Aye, t' young leddy mun be Miss Edith Holt. She's a soärt of a secriterry to his lordship. She kem frae somewheer i' t' South, soom pleäce neämed efter a coo. Dang me if I can think."

"Named after a cow?"

"Well, mebbe t' coo was called efter t' pleäce. Blow me —"

Suddenly light was vouchsafed to Lester. "Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney?" he tried.

"That's it, Alderney. Good cast, sir!"

"Ah, hence the marquise," murmured Lester.

Jones was puzzled again. He laughed, in case there was a lurking joke. The word suggested a circus or a fair to him, but his guest went on:

"And who is Mr. Warren?"

"He's t' agent, Mrs. Warren's son. She's t' housekeeper at t' Hall. A nice fat job she's gotten him. A bonny agent to be sure! He doesn't know wuts (oats) frae turnips till they're cooked. By gum! Farmer Brown tell't me t'other day —"

Any further gossip was cut short by the rapid clatter of a horse hard ridden up the village street. The rider, a groom, dismounted in great haste outside a house with a brass plate on the door.

"What's wrang noo?" said the landlord. "Yon's one o' Lord Arncliffe's men. Somebody ill, I'll be bound, as sure as my name's J. J.!"

Lester, of course, was in a position to hazard a guess on the point, but he said nothing. A consultation between the messenger and a serving maid caused the former to turn away, mopping his head in perplexity. A glass of beer is the usual resource of such a man if his brains are taxed unduly. The groom, tucking his bridle under his arm, led his horse toward the "Fisherman's Rest."

"Here's a nice thing!" he cried, in response to Jones's inquiry. "Lord Arncliffe at death's door, an' Dr. Smalley gone off on a round the Lord knows

where! What's best to be done — ride to Moseley or telegraph to Alnwick?"

"His lordship dyin'? S'welp me!" gasped the innkeeper.

"So Mrs. Warren said. She told me to ride like — well, as fast as I could, for Dr. Smalley, an' now I'm in a fix."

"Did you say mixed ale?" was all Jones was able to ask, for he was dazed by the news.

"Can I be of any service?" interposed Lester. "I am a doctor."

"Are you, sir?" cried the groom. "Can you ride?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, take my mare. It's a godsend to have met you. Tell Mrs. Warren how it happened, an' say I am following. I have left word for Dr. Smalley."

"Has Lord Arncliffe had a sudden seizure? Is he an old man?"

"He is very old, sir, but, though ailing, he has had nothing like this before."

"Is he stout?"

"Bless you, sir, he's thin as a herring!"

George Lester quickly ran up-stairs, grabbed a small instrument case from his portmanteau, obtained some directions from the groom as he swung into the saddle, and was gone before Jones appeared with a brimming tankard.

The inn-keeper had earned his nickname because he could laugh on any pretext. He grinned now vacuously.

"So he's a docther, is he," was his comment. "Dang me, I thowt he was a gentleman!"

"Anyhow, he can ride," said the groom.

A pleasant country road, a lodge, a well-kept drive through a fine park sheltered by woods glorious in their June boscage, whirled past Lester during that strenuous gallop. The mare was a good one, and her head was turned toward the stables; so not many minutes elapsed ere he was breathlessly asking for Mrs. Warren at the spacious entrance to the fine mansion he already had seen amid the trees.

To avoid delay, he told the footman why he was there, and he was surprised when the man returned, white-faced, with a stammering message from Mr., not Mrs., Warren that he was too late. Lord Arncliffe was dead. Yet the footman was obviously startled by the news.

"Take my compliments to Mr. Warren," said Lester with some emphasis, "and tell him that he has arrived at a serious decision. None except a medical man can decide that question."

The passive resistance apparently offered to professional aid was astonishing. It tended to throw George Lester into a critical, if not hostile, frame of mind. A gardener offered to hold his horse, so he

advanced a few steps into the wide hall. That Lord Arncliffe, when living, was a dilettante of exquisite taste and far-reaching knowledge was evident at a glance. Here were Saracen and old Spanish coats of mail, steel inlaid with gold, shields of Japanese lacquer, bossed with carved dragons in oxidized silver, portraits by Lely and Gainsborough, porcelain from Sèvres and Dresden, statuettes from Pompeii, squat figures of long-forgotten gods from Southern India. Quaintly varied as were the trappings of hall and splendid oak staircase, each object was a gem in itself. Wealth alone could not have gathered the display. The soul of a collector, the cunning eye of a connoisseur, must have commanded the purse of a millionaire, if the remainder of the house was decked with an artistic hoard to match this first sample of its treasures.

He was admiring a jade vase, embellished with scrollwork in red gold, when the rustle of a dress came from a corridor leading into the broad landing of the stairs. Followed by the footman, an elderly woman appeared. Her attire, a black gown of stiff silk, her lace cap, a bunch of shining keys at her waist, the lines in her pallid face expressing discipline and order, showed that this could be none other than the housekeeper, Mrs. Warren. Lester, prone to idle musings, wondered if she would object to the dust on his garments, so prim was she, and

so spick and span the polished oak and tessellated floor of the mansion she ruled.

But her somewhat harsh features softened into a mechanical affability when Lester advanced to meet her. She had been observing him narrowly as she descended the stairs, and a woman of her position might be trusted to sum up a stranger with exceeding accuracy.

"My son did not quite understand the footman's message," she said in measured accents, though her natural emotion was betrayed by the effort to speak without constraint. "Of course we are only too glad that a doctor should see his lordship. May I ask your name, sir?"

"George Lester. Although not practising now, I have recently been medical officer to the Associated Gold-Fields Company on the West Coast of Africa."

"Are you staying in the village?"

She turned to usher him to the upper floor, and he briefly accounted for his presence as they went on together. They traversed a long passage, adorned throughout with rare pictures, ancient arms, and fine china, with here and there a wonderful buhl cabinet or marquetry table. Pausing at the end door on the right, Mrs. Warren stepped aside.

"Lord Arncliffe's bedroom," she whispered. "We brought him here from the library when — when Simpson found him."

Lester asked no questions. The time for explanation was not yet. Some one, seemingly Lord Arncliffe's agent, had spoken of death. Let that all-important verdict be ratified first.

The room was dim. Green blinds shut out the afternoon sun. On a narrow bed lay a diminutive figure, fully dressed. Near a window stood the man with the red gaiters. Nearer the still form on the bed was a liveried servant, aged and bent, gulping back his grief. Lester almost expected to find Miss Holt there too, but the large room held no other occupant. He noticed, but paid no heed to, the surprised air of the agent when he entered the room.

His first action was to raise the blind of the window nearest the bed. Then he stooped over the shrunken form stretched so stiffly on the coverlet. Waistcoat and shirt had been disarranged at the breast. He lifted an eyelid, and a glance sufficed. The cornea was opaque. Though this sign is practically infallible, Lester applied a stethoscope to the region of the heart. He listened intently for a period that must have seemed long to the watchers. Then he straightened himself.

"Yes, he is dead," he said.

There was a pause of tense silence. Even the weeping domestic withheld his sobs. Lester leaned over the bed again. Clearly, his attention was

drawn by a slight irritation of the skin of the neck and scalp.

"He has been dead for more than an hour," volunteered Warren, speaking in the sharp, suspicious tone of one who resents, but cannot prevent, an intrusion.

"Has Dr. Smalley been in regular attendance on Lord Arncliffe?" inquired Lester, still examining the dead man's face.

Mrs. Warren answered. "Yes, in a sense," she said. "Dr. Smalley saw him two days ago."

"Did the doctor prescribe any medicine?"

"Lord Arncliffe would not touch any drug or alcoholic stimulant."

"Did he appear to be in his usual health to-day?"

"Oh, yes. He was at work in the library with Miss Holt until five o'clock. Then, as was her usual habit, she brought him a cup of beef tea and some biscuits, and left him with his papers."

"Did the beef tea and biscuits constitute his last meal?"

"Yes, sir. Simpson went in soon after six. His lordship was lying back in his chair, dead, to all appearance."

"He had — taken — the beef tea — but only one — biscuit," said Simpson, brokenly. George Lester assumed that the man was the trusted attendant of the deceased peer.

"Can you let me see the vessel which contained the beef tea?"

Mrs. Warren hesitated. The question was unexpected. Then she said: "Simpson, go and bring the tray from the table, if it is still in the library."

The servant, faithful to his training, at once recovered his self-possession when given an order. He left the room. No word was spoken until he returned with the message: "A housemaid took the things to the kitchen, ma'am."

"You heard this gentleman's request. Ask if they have gone to the scullery," said Mrs. Warren sharply. Lester, listening, recalled his fleeting thought about the dust. Not even the tragedy of her master's sudden death could deprive the housekeeper of her authoritative air. Yet she spoke as if her social rank were far above her son's. When she uttered a command there could be no disputing it.

Simpson came back quickly. Meanwhile, Lester had peered again into both eyes of the dead man, and had tested the rigidity of an arm.

The servant carried a tray containing a silver biscuit box, a small covered jug, and a cup and saucer.

Lester glanced at the various articles. "They have been washed," he commented.

"Yes, sir. A house order."

"Well," admitted Mrs. Warren, "that is so, of course. I thought that in the excitement of his lordship's seizure the maids might not have been so prompt. But do you think the beef tea was harmful, Dr. Lester? It was prepared by the same cook who has made it for several years almost without exception."

"It is hard to say," was the non-committal answer.

"Dr. Smalley believed his lordship's heart was affected. He told me so many a time," growled Harry Warren.

"I am sure of it," said Lester. "No doubt Lord Arncliffe suffered from occasional sickness, perhaps fainting fits?"

"Not that I know of," replied Warren.

"Oh yes, he did!" broke in Simpson. "I told you, Mrs. Warren, didn't I, ma'am?"

"Certainly. Dr. Smalley was anxious about these symptoms, though they were very slight and far from frequent. Lord Arncliffe was sensitive about such matters, so they were never discussed."

There was a knock at the door. A tubby, bald-headed little man, balancing gold-rimmed *pince nez* on his nose, with drops of perspiration glistening on his forehead, entered precipitately.

"Bless my soul! what is this I hear?" he cried.

"I am grieved to tell you that his lordship is dead, Dr. Smalley," said Mrs. Warren in her quiet well-

bred way. "This gentleman is Dr. Lester, who, fortunately, met one of the grooms near your house in the village."

Dr. Smalley nodded with marked coolness. In such wise did interlopers pry into a new practise!

But Lester paid no heed to his fellow-practitioner's hauteur. He waited until Dr. Smalley had concluded an examination on his own part. Then he touched the village doctor's arm.

"Will you oblige me by coming into the corridor a moment?" he asked.

"There's nothing —" began the other stiffly.

"Exactly. I only wish a word in private with you."

"Pooh! Why this air of mystery, my good sir? Lord Arncliffe died from aortic regurgitation. I have warned him repeatedly."

Lester was nettled by the little man's absurd introduction of professional rivalry into the affair. Yet his demeanor was unruffled.

"I am an utter stranger in Arncliffe," he explained. "Even his lordship's name was unknown to me before to-day. Therefore —"

"Pre-cisely, my dear sir. Lord Arncliffe's illness and its sad conclusion are entirely within my province."

Dr. Smalley placed his hands behind his back

and glared up at Lester defiantly. More than once had he frightened away possible competitors by similar tactics. There was nothing else for it; Lester must speak openly.

"I was going to tell you," he said with cold distinctness, "that Lord Arncliffe's heart failure was not due to natural causes. It arose from the administration of arsenic in one of its many forms. Lord Arncliffe has been poisoned!"

CHAPTER II

LORD ARNCLIFFE CONTINUES THE DISPUTE

"POISONED?" cried Harry Warren, with the loud scorn of a man asked to credit the incredible.

"Poisoned?" echoed his mother, gazing affrightedly at Lester. Her thin face blanched and she clutched at the steel chain which held the bunch of jangling keys as though the suggestion conveyed a sinister imputation against her household management.

And Dr. Smalley became angry indeed.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he almost shouted. "How dare you come here, sir, and make such ridiculous statements? His lordship has been my patient for years. There is not the slightest ground for your opinion. It is grotesque and untenable. It amounts to a positive outrage. I absolutely refuse to accept it."

Lester looked the enraged little man straight in the eyes. The wrathful obstinacy he found therein would have amused him under different conditions. As it was, he declined the threatened argument.

"I have warned you, and I consider that my duty ends there," he said quietly. "I came to Arncliffe in search of peace. Believe me, I have no wish to be drawn into a distasteful controversy."

But Dr. Smalley was not to be pacified.

"You seem to forget, sir," he vociferated, "that your idiotic charge contains a grave reflection on my treatment of his lordship, and implies either that he has killed himself or that some member of his household has committed murder. Let me tell you, sir —"

Lester waved a deprecating hand to stay the torrent of words. He went out, closing the door behind him. None of the others offered to stay his departure. It was only natural that they should take Dr. Smalley's view of the dispute.

At the door, he told the waiting gardener to lead the horse to the stables. Dr. Smalley's gig was standing there, too. For the second time within the hour he walked slowly back to the village.

Half-way he met the groom, who seemed to be surprised.

"Is his lordship better, sir?" inquired the man.

"He is dead," was the answer. Ere the groom could gurgle forth his amazement, Lester asked him if he had seen Dr. Smalley.

"No, sir," he replied.

"Then the doctor must have heard of Lord Arn-

cliffe's illness from some other source; he is at the Hall now."

"He may have come into the park by the West Lodge, sir. It is possible he drove through on his way home. But for goodness' sake, sir, what did his lordship die of?"

"Dr. Smalley has been in attendance on your master. He will assign the cause of death," was the guarded answer. If Lester could help it, no hint of a difference between doctors should pass beyond the confines of the dimly lighted room where lay the mortal remains of the owner of Arncliffe.

Before he reached the "Fisherman's Rest" he had made up his mind to pursue a definite course. His assumption that Lord Arncliffe had been poisoned, either by design or accident, rested on no more firm basis than a guess, a scientific guess, it is true, but without the essential warrant of thorough investigation. Perhaps he was mistaken. An old man, possibly somewhat eccentric in his ways, and with dogmatic views anent food and medicine, might easily have acquired symptoms calculated to deceive the eye of even an experienced investigator like George Lester.

The village doctor did not know that his imaginary rival was one of the most eminent toxicologists of the day. Passing out of Edinburgh University, after taking the highest honors in *materia medica*

and chemistry, Lester was at once appointed lecturer in the first of these sciences; but no sooner had he laid the foundations of a most successful career than he imperiled his future by accepting a trivial appointment on the staff of a West African exploration company. In reality, he enhanced his reputation. His studies in plant and insect poison, carried on in the Ashanti bush, earned him a world-wide reputation. Before he was thirty he was famous.

Such credentials do not render a man bumptious or intolerant. Only he who climbs the tree of knowledge can tell how wary must be each upward step, and George Lester, the brilliant investigator, honored by his own government, a recognized authority in the medical schools of the Continent, was in a curiously humble frame of mind as he entered the village. He already regretted the momentary resentment of Dr. Smalley's pompous air which induced him to utter the drastic opinion. The little doctor might have been profoundly amazed were he able to read Lester's thoughts at that moment. Conviction was rapidly yielding to doubt. There was some chance that, ere night fell, the author of "Toxic Analysis" would seek the fiery-eyed Smalley and apologize to him.

But the circumstances which conspire against human happiness wing their unseen flight from the most unlikely quarters. "Jolly Jim" Jones, noted

only for his laugh and his taste in beer, was the unconscious agent who quickened a lulled suspicion into fresh activity.

Although genuinely sorry to hear that the Earl was dead, Jones soon recovered his wonted buoyancy and proceeded to entertain his guest with reminiscences of the deceased peer.

"By gum!" said he, "I thowt his lo'dship 'ud live till he wur a hundred. He wur hard as nails, teuf as a bit o' seasoned yak." (Anglice, oak.) "An' he wur a clever owd bird, too. He knew summat about everythink. One day he chaffed me wi' more ways o' hocussing spirits than I'd ivver heerd tell of afore. Gosh! he med me roar."

And Jones showed how he roared.

"Another time," he went on, after regaining his breath, "his lo'dship walked around my bit o' garden, an' he nearly skeered me into a fit. By gum! he said as how honey could be poisoned by bees feedin' on rhodydendrums, and henbane or water dropwort mistakken for parsnips. As for mushrooms, he called 'em sike neäms I've nivver had one i' t' house since."

Lester suddenly found the garrulous landlord's talk exceedingly interesting.

"Did Lord Arncliffe really show much knowledge of poisons?" he asked.

"Poisons?" repeated Jones, grinning widely.

"I'll take my solemn davy he a'most med me suspect my own beer. He talked about some stuff he called pick-row-somethin'-or-other —"

"Picrotoxin?"

"Ay, that's it. By gum! Give a man a taste o' that in a pint an' you'll see things. You doctors mun be rum fellers to quarrel wi', to my thinkin'."

Such obvious philosophy required a pull at the beer-handle to soften its rigor. Lester escaped to his room, sat down at a writing-table, and set forth on paper, briefly but clearly, his reasons for thinking that Lord Arncliffe had died from arsenical poisoning. After the landlord's curiously appropriate story he had no other course left open. There might be an inquest, with far-reaching consequences. No matter what the inconvenience to himself, he could not shirk the outcome of his own definite pronouncement in the presence of four persons. So George Lester wrote a short record of the facts, sealed the paper in an envelope, and gave it to the landlord, with a request that the latter should place it in his safe.

"You will not forget the date and the hour?" he said, noticing that Jones weighed the small package in his hand with a certain air of doubt.

"Why, noä, sir," grinned the other. "What is it? It mun be a bank-note, or summat o' t' soart."

"No, it is merely a statement. You see I was

called in accidentally to visit Lord Arncliffe. In such cases it is always best to be accurate. I have jotted down my observations. That is all. The paper may not be wanted again, but you will oblige me by keeping it and producing it if called on by me."

"Certainly, sir. I'm a careful man meself. I nivver buy owt that I doän't enter t' day an' t' price in a note-book. Once I bowt a pig —"

A maid reported that a fine trout and other delicacies awaited Lester in the coffee-room, so the pig-buying episode was interrupted. Lester dined alone. There happened to be no other anglers staying at the inn that day. Propping a London daily paper against the cruet-stand, he endeavored to read an article dealing with Anglo-American influences on affairs in the Far East. In a word, he determined to rid his thoughts of all further speculation about the dead master of Arncliffe, and succeeded so well that, with coffee and a cigar, he wheeled his chair to secure a better light while he scanned the newspaper in comfort.

Hence, he was positively surprised when the maid brought a letter, correctly addressed to him, and bearing the Arncliffe arms, a stag couchant proper on a field d'or. But his surprise kindled into actual amazement when he read:

"DEAR SIR: Simpson, the man who was present to-day when you met Dr. Smalley in Lord Arncliffe's bedroom, has told me what you said. I was so shocked and grieved by the death of one to whom I owe everything that I failed at first to give your words their true significance. Now, however, I feel it a sacred duty that I should acquaint you with certain matters within my knowledge. I do not think I can ask you to come to the Hall, and, in a small place like Arncliffe, it would cause needless comment were I to call and see you at the inn. Can you meet me at the East Lodge gate at nine o'clock? The terrible occurrence of this afternoon must be my excuse for such an unconventional request. Yours faithfully,

"EDITH HOLT.

"P. S. I have been Lord Arncliffe's secretary and amanuensis during the past three years. I should add that it was to my assistance you came to-day in the Fen Ghyll. E. H."

Although not a man of hesitating mood, Lester drew a deep breath of dubiety when he reached the end of this short but decisive note. There are, in a man's life, certain rare moments of divination. They are mysterious, occult, fleeting as the gleam of lightning in the depths of a somber cloud. They carry an impalpable message of hidden fate, so distinct as to be undeniable, yet so vague that no sane intelligence can interpret them for good or evil. One of these glimpses behind the veil of futurity was vouchsafed to him now, and he wondered with unaccustomed awe what the portent signified. He was sure that the tryst fixed for the ensuing hour would have an uncontrollable influence on his career. Events were slowly but inexorably conspiring to

enmesh him within a web of exceeding strength. Should he escape while yet the way was open?

A polite refusal to meet this lovely "marquise," on the plea that he was leaving Arncliffe at once, showed the path of expediency. His eyes, fixed in thought, fell again on the letter: "The death of one to whom I owe everything," she wrote. Once before that day he had gone to her in a moment of distress. Should he refuse her now in a greater need? George Lester might be a clever and clear-sighted young man, nevertheless, he was a young man.

"Tell the messenger I will keep the appointment," he said to the waiting servant. "Or, perhaps, I had better write a note."

"Please, sir, the boy said there was no answer. He has gone."

Then Lester laughed. He was spared all hesitancy. It was intolerable that Miss Edith Holt, the girl with the Greuze face and figure, should be allowed to wait in vain outside the East Lodge for one who came not.

"No answer is the most conclusive of all answers," he said, and smiled.

The girl smiled, too, though she understood him not at all.

"He is such a nice gentleman!" she confided to the kitchen maid, who was dressed for going out.

"But he looks at you sometimes as if he didn't see you."

"An' that won't suit you," commented the other tartly, the house-maid being the better looking of the pair.

"I'm not used to it like you are, Lizzie," was the flippant retort.

Lizzie glared, but curiosity conquered pique when her fellow-servant went on:

"I've just given him a note from the Hall. It was in a lady's handwriting. I wonder who he knows there?"

"Who brought it?"

"Jackson's little boy." Jackson was a gardener employed on the Arncliffe estate.

"If I meet him I'll ask who sent it."

"It was to make an appointment of some sort."

"You don't say? I'll just hurry out. Mebbe I'll overtake him."

So Lizzie hurried, and caught the Jackson urchin swapping marbles with another boy on the outskirts of the village. But she failed to extract any information from him, a largesse of sixpence having insured discretion.

Lizzie was baffled. She went to visit a friend, and it was one of the queer coincidences of fate that she should happen to catch sight of George Lester's

tall figure as he strolled toward the park a few minutes before nine o'clock.

"Well, I must be off now," she cried, a sudden impulse moving her to follow him.

"Why, this is no time to go!" protested her gossip. "You needn't be home yet for another hour or more."

"I've got to meet me sweetheart," grinned Lizzie.

"You told me he was given a job in Newcastle as a porter."

"This is a friend of his who takes care of me on his account," was the jaunty reply, and Lizzie darted forth into the soft shadows of a fine June night.

Within the nearest gate of the park Lester saw Edith Holt. Though, of course, she was attired in different garments from the summer-like costume of their earlier meeting, he recognized her at the first glance. She walked with a free elegance, and carried herself with a distinction that would serve to single her out from a crowd anywhere. Here, with never a rival, Edith Holt had the semblance of a rank far higher than that accorded her by the landlord's chatter.

Being neither a prude nor a gallant, Lester wondered what their strange meeting really meant. He realized that the girl must have yielded to some powerful motive ere she wrote to him, and he felt, too, that it lay with him to redeem her from the

natural embarrassment of their first exchange of words. Hence, the surprises of that day of bewilderment were only increased when he found that Miss Holt, who passed through the gate before he could reach it, took the lead in their conversation.

"It is very good of you to be so punctual," she said. "Shall we walk this way?"

She indicated the high road, leading away from the village.

"I am entirely at your service," said Lester.

"I need hardly apologize for my letter," she began again instantly. "Most fortunately, you are a doctor, and, in grave trouble, one turns to a doctor for help as instinctively as to a lawyer or a clergyman."

"You have my sympathy already, and believe me you shall have my best counsel," said he.

Now, the truth was that Lester was taken aback by the girl's demeanor. He was in no way conceited, nor could his detractors, if such existed, describe him as a "ladies' man." But that this beautiful young woman should so calmly relegate him to the category of fatherly gray-heads gave him a twinge of annoyance that none of her sex had succeeded in inflicting before.

Utterly unconscious of her own attitude, Edith Holt passed a hand over her eyes as though to clear away a baffling mist.

"The Earl was my only friend," she continued

in a strained, nervous manner which told how feverishly she was controlling her emotions. "I did not exaggerate when I said that I owed everything in the world to him. When my dear father died, nearly ten years ago, I was left alone, a little girl of nine, but Heaven inspired my father on his death-bed to write to his old school-fellow, Sir William Bradshaw, as he was then, and ask him to care for me."

"Sir William Bradshaw, the great cotton manufacturer! Did he become Earl of Arncliffe?"

"Yes, only three years since. His gifts to the nation, his endowment of two universities, brought him a peerage, which he accepted only as a joke. 'It will inter me decently,' he used to say. 'People will forget that such an old fossil as Bradshaw is still living.' My dear old friend and benefactor! Who could have wished him harm?" She stopped to choke back a sob.

Lester, wishing to soothe her, said quietly: "Do not be too ready to adopt my hasty conclusion, Miss Holt. Lord Arncliffe, whose career is, of course, well known to me, was an old man. It is amazing to me now to realize that I, too, owe him a certain measure of success in my profession. It was Sir William Bradshaw who provided funds for the Tropical Fevers Commission which came to West Africa —"

"And are you the Dr. George Lester who discovered the *Micrococcus Africanus?*" she interrupted.

They halted and gazed at one another with renewed interest. As for Lester, he was astounded. Not many young ladies of nineteen could speak thus glibly of the tiny organism he had detected in the fever-laden blood of a Congo nomad only a few months earlier. But the transient gleam fled from the girl's brilliant eyes.

"Lord Arncliffe followed your researches carefully," she explained. "I compiled a small record of them. How delighted he would have been to talk to you! And now he is dead, and you have come too late to save him! For you could have saved him, Dr. Lester. I believe now he was poisoned. I am sure of it."

"It is a difficult matter of which to speak so confidently. I may have been mistaken, and I gather that the suspicion in your mind was created only by my words."

"It is hard to make things clear; but the Earl believed he was being poisoned. He often hinted at it, especially of late. I fancied he was giving way to the vagaries of old age, though, indeed, his fine intellect might have shown me the folly of such a doubt. I assure you, Dr. Lester, he strongly suspected, I may almost say he knew, that some

one was killing him. Oh! why did I not listen to him? Even *I* might have helped a little bit to thwart a murderous design."

There was no denying the girl's implicit faith. Her sorrowful eyes looked up into the starlit sky. Her grief was such that the tears could not be checked.

"That is a very serious statement to make, Miss Holt. Can you help my judgment by any specific fact? In a word, do you yourself suspect anybody?"

Lester felt that she would be calmer if recalled to the direct issue of the tragedy. Nor was he unprepared for her answer.

"Suspect? I? You saw me to-day in the park, reading some stupid book in the very hour when Lord Arncliffe was dying. Would I have been there were I suspicious of a poisoner? I am in a maze, Dr. Lester, a maze of terror. I am only certain of the one dreadful thing: some loathsome creature has killed my friend."

They were walking slowly along a road bordered, on one hand, by the dense belt of fir-trees which guarded the park, and, on the other, by a steep bank covered with brambles and hazel-bushes. Lester was not aware that a foot-path traversed its higher ground — it was indeed the ancient track of moss-trooping days superseded by a graded highway. But a man who has led expeditions through the

forests and swamps of the Congo should possess hearing trained to a marvelous degree where lurking foe or prowling beast is concerned. A slight rustle of grass on the elevated path conveyed a warning, the first time — there was no doubt the second.

"Pardon me one moment," said he to his companion. Then he sprang lightly up the bank, and peered through a clump of nut-trees. Edith Holt heard a slight cry of dismay as Lester confronted the shrinking form of the enterprising Lizzie.

"Why are you trying to overhear our conversation?" he demanded sternly.

"Please, sir, I wasn't," she stuttered, alternately blushing and paling.

"If you are not a spy, you should not behave like one. Which way are you going?"

"Back to the village, sir."

The words had scarcely left her lips before Lizzie realized her error. She had practically admitted her eavesdropping tactics. Her face burned as she turned and hurried away. But she was exceedingly angry, and, with a queer, feline spite, she longed to revenge her humiliation on the fair woman who had not even seen her.

"Who is she, I'd like to know?" snorted the kitchen-maid. "With all her fine airs an' her long words, she's only a servant like me."

She was passing the lodge when the rhythmic beat

of a horse's hoofs, hard driven, came from the park. Being out of sight of Miss Holt and Lester, she slackened her pace. The lodge-keeper opened the gate, and Harry Warren drove through in a dog-cart.

An elfish spirit of mischief moved the girl to cry out to him:

"Are ye lookin' for Miss Holt, sir?"

"No," answered he in surprise; then, taking thought, he pulled up the horse.

"Why did you ask me that?" he went on sharply.

Lizzie was demure. "I only wanted to save you trouble, sir, in case ye were seekin' her."

"Miss Holt is at the Hall," said he.

"Oh no, she's not. She is walkin' up the road there, with Mr. Lester, a gentleman who is stayin' at the 'Fisherman's Rest.'"

The vindictive note in her voice might have astonished the estate agent if her statement had not set other speculations jarring in his brain.

He hesitated, handled the reins irresolutely as though minded to turn the vehicle, but seemingly changed his half-formed intention, and drove off at a rare rate toward the village. A groom, seated stiffly on the back seat, watched the girl curiously until the trap whirled him into the night.

"That's one for her," said Lizzie with a sour smile. "And now I'll give her another, if only I can find May Mannering."

The railway-station, as in many English country districts, was situated a needless half-mile away from the village, practically as far to the east as the Hall lay to the west. Warren tore through the village street and reached the station ten minutes too soon, his apparent mission being to meet the last train due to arrive that night.

The train was punctual, and an elderly man alighted from a first-class carriage. He moved briskly enough, although his head and shoulders had the student's stoop. His sharply cut, somewhat wizened features wore a distinctly legal aspect, and his remarkably bright eyes, peering under heavy, white-haired brows, discerned Warren standing on the platform long before the younger man could pick him out amid the crowd of hurrying passengers.

The newcomer was Mr. Aingier, of Aingier, Smith & Co., solicitors, Grey Street, Newcastle, and King's Bench Walk, London. Aingier greeted Warren cordially, but he had an imperative way with him, and he showed it in his manner of ordering the groom to place a couple of portmanteaus on the back of the dog-cart and walk to the Hall.

"I wish to talk without a servant being a listener," he explained to Warren. "But why are we traveling at such a pace?" he demanded.

"The mare is rather fresh," said Warren.

"So it would appear. You must either moderate her ardor or I shall walk with the groom."

Thus admonished, Warren steadied the animal, and Aingier began to question him. The estate agent gave an accurate account of events at the Hall, and did not scruple to express his contempt for the view taken by Lester as to the probable cause of the Earl's death.

But Aingier was much interested.

"Who is this young man?" he asked. "Where is he staying? Is he known to any one locally?"

"I never heard of him before to-day. As a matter of fact, if you wish to see him, we may meet him on the road. I was told that Miss Holt and he were walking together half an hour since."

"Miss Holt? Is he a friend of hers?"

"Not to my knowledge. I am almost sure that she, too, met him to-day for the first time."

"This is a very strange story, Mr. Warren."

"It is, indeed."

"I am not alluding to Miss Holt's penchant for an evening stroll with a stranger. I am thinking of this Mr. Lester's statement. You are aware, I suppose, that in addition to my partnership in a firm which conducts Lord Arncliffe's legal affairs, I am one of the trustees under his lordship's will. Under the circumstances, your communication warrants me in divulging one, at least, of his lord-

ship's testamentary conditions somewhat in advance of the ordinary course of events. Early in the present year my poor old friend added a codicil to his will. I tried to dissuade him, and even argued that he was indulging in a piece of folly which might have most unpleasant results. But what you have now told me compels, as I have said, a remarkable avowal. Lord Arncliffe, in his codicil, deliberately states that some one was endeavoring to poison him. He directs that, in the event of his sudden death, a post-mortem examination shall be held by Home Office experts, and, finally, he sets apart the sum of ten thousand pounds as a reward to the person who, in the opinion of his trustees, is chiefly responsible for the conviction of his murderer."

CHAPTER III

THE THREADS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Harry Warren was so startled that he forgot the lawyer's prohibition and brought down his whip smartly on the mare's shoulders. He was a man prone to vent his feelings with violence. He never scrupled to lash a horse or kick a dog should the animal be near enough at the moment to gratify this brutal trait.

"Let me get out!" cried Aingier with some heat.

"Oh! I am sorry. Whoa, beauty! There now, she is all right. I forgot myself. If I have a whip in my hand I must use it. But, look here, Mr. Aingier, this is all rot! Dr. Smalley has given a certificate. His lordship died of heart-disease."

"So shall I, unless you drive properly," was the curt response. For a little time the solicitor sat in silence, clinging to the side rail and nervously watching the horse's ears. Warren, cursing his own stupidity in checking the other man's confidences, gave closer heed to his task. Nevertheless, they passed through the village rapidly.

Two girls, chatting at the garden gate of a neat

cottage, watched the dog-cart go by. In the dim light it was difficult to distinguish the occupants of a fast-moving vehicle.

"Isn't that Harry Warren?" asked one of the pair, an apple-cheeked young woman whose indoor attire betokened that the cottage was probably her residence.

"Yes. I saw him as he came from the Hall. He has been to fetch some one from the station, most likely."

There was an indecisive pause. Then the first speaker said with a pout: "I wonder he didn't call, or at least wave his hand in passing. Ever since the New Year he makes out he has been so busy that he can hardly give me half an hour a week."

The rattle of the vehicle died away. The solemn calm of a summer's night settled down again on the quiet hamlet.

"Harry and you are engaged, aren't you, May?" said her friend.

"Of course we are. Every one knows that. If it wasn't for his mother we should have been married last year. As soon as Harry feels he is his own master there will be no more waiting, I assure you."

The assertive note was needlessly shrill. Perhaps Lizzie felt that she had meddled enough in other people's business that evening, or it might be that the walk homeward had cooled her temper. Any-

how, she refrained now from positive assertions, and dread of a searching cross-examination kept her from repeating the stray phrases she had gathered from Edith Holt's words. But she would not be a mischief-maker were she to leave the topic wholly.

"Will his lordship's death make any difference?" she asked.

"Difference? To me and Harry?"

"Don't snap at me in that fashion, May. I only mean that somebody else will own the Hall. Who is it; have you heard?"

"No one knows. That is, Harry doesn't, and he could hear any news that was going. But the Earl told him that he and his mother would not suffer, no matter what happened. Not that I don't mind telling you I shall be glad when everything is settled."

The girl sighed deeply. The camaraderie of feminine sentiment caused Lizzie to twist her next question out of its imminent form. "Do you know — I mean, have you seen much of that pale-faced, fluffy-haired girl at the Hall, the girl who writes his lordship's letters?"

"Miss Holt? No. She is always either reading by herself or doing all sorts of odd jobs about pictures and china. I don't rightly understand her situation. Harry says he hardly ever sees her."

"Oh!" said Lizzie, whose acquaintance with

Mrs. Jackson, wife of gardener Jackson, led her to hold precisely the opposite view. "Well, good-by, dear. It is nearly ten — closing time, you know. Ask me to the wedding."

"Good-by!"

They kissed and parted.

"I'm sorry for May," mused Lizzie, speeding to the inn. "Ought I to have spoken, I wonder? Better not, perhaps, I do so hate tittle-tattling!"

Harry Warren's reputed fiancée did not re-enter the cottage. She was disturbed by vague misgivings. She looked up at the stars wistfully, striving to find sympathy in their fine aloofness from such petty troubles as centered in Arncliffe, though the tame astrologer of a woman's fashion paper had told her she must beware of Sirius the dog-star, ascendant in July.

"Half an hour a week!" she murmured bitterly. "If I had said half an hour a month I'd have been nearer the mark. And why did Lizzie mention Miss Holt? He swore to me he hated the sight of her, with her pretty ways and her mincing talk. Of course, he may have had things to occupy him; but it used not to be so. Maybe, now that the Earl has gone —"

She heard some one walking smartly down the road. She peered intently at the figure, and the

livery of a groom helped her to identify the pedestrian.

"Is that you, Wilson?" she cried.

"Yes, miss." The groom knew her well, having brought her many a note from the agent.

"Who was Mr. Warren taking to the Hall?"

"Mr. Aingier, the family solicitor, miss."

"Oh, he has come to look after affairs, I suppose?"

The groom drew nearer. "That, and a bit more, miss," he said.

May Mannering was a pretty girl, of the healthy bloom which is dear to the countryman's heart. Secretly, Wilson admired her, and he was sorry for her too, having used his eyes shrewdly, being a "Border man."

"Has anything gone wrong, then?" she asked.

"Well, miss, there's queer rumors," he admitted.

"But his lordship was very old. Surely his death was expected?"

"Some people say it was a certainty, miss."

"That is true of all of us, Wilson."

"By gum, that's a fact! But we don't know the date, so there's no use in worrying. Anyhow, folk are hinting that the Earl had to die this afternoon."

"Good gracious, Wilson! What do you mean?"

"If I say anything, you'll not give me away, not even to Mr. Harry?"

"No. I am usually reckoned a trustworthy person."

"No one need tell me that, miss, Well, there's a strange gent here, a fishing gent staying at 'Jolly Jim's' place, who up and said to-day that his lordship had been poisoned."

"Wilson!"

"It's the truth I'm telling you, sure as my name's Bob. Did you know my name was Bob, miss?"

He was standing so close to her now that he could see the troubled droop of her full lips. Yet his attitude was so respectful that she thought only of his mysterious revelation.

"I believe you are not making up a story," she said. "But what is behind it? Did the Earl poison himself?"

"By gum! you have me there, miss. The strange gent said nothing about that. Only, you mark my words, there will be wigs on the green here to-morrow! Simpson, his lordship's man, you know, miss, is crazed about the master's death. He swears he'll speak out, no matter what happens."

"You are hinting at something. Out with it!"

"Simpson says the Earl was killed a-purpose. He knows something; but I don't know what. If I did, miss, I'd tell you, honor bright, for I'd trust you more than anybody."

He leaned against the gate, and the girl felt that he was nervous, even a little excited.

She was surprised, and retired a pace.

"The scandal will not be spread by me," she said coldly. "Of that you may be sure. Naturally, I am very sorry to think that the person lives who could wish harm to a dear old gentleman like Lord Arncliffe. Good night, Wilson."

"Good night, miss," he sighed.

"And, by the way, should you be passing to-morrow you might call if you have any further news."

He brightened up considerably. "You may rely on me, miss. Something will turn up, that's certain, and I'll get out somehow." He strode off, softly whistling a popular air.

She watched him from the porch. "I do believe," she said to herself, "that Wilson was sheepishly anxious to flirt with me. Yet he is aware that I am engaged to Harry. And they say Lord Arncliffe was murdered! What can it all mean?"

"Now, honey, it's time that lass was yam (home) an' i' bed," came a thin voice from within the cottage.

"All right, mother. I'm coming."

The girl pressed her hands against her bosom in a tumultuous rush of agonizing doubt. Then she went in and barred the door on specters;

but it is hard to say whether or not she was successful.

Warren, who was really a skilful driver, succeeded in restoring Aingier's confidence before they reached the first gate of the park.

"Would you mind if I drove round to the West Lodge?" he asked.

"Why do you wish to take the longer route?" was the cautious query.

"We may meet Mr. Lester. I thought that you might like to have a word or two with him." Warren was prepared with this explanation. It was forthcoming readily.

"Not a bad idea. It is late already, and I can do little at the Hall to-night." In reality, the old lawyer was tickled with the notion that he might have a chance to question an important witness taken unawares.

The maneuver failed, for the good reason that Lester not only escorted Edith Holt back to the East Lodge, but obtained her permission to walk with her to the door of the Hall.

The pair in the dog-cart encountered no one on the highway, nor was any person other than a gamekeeper to be seen on the white ribbon of the open drive within the park. Harry Warren unconsciously flicked the mare again, and Aingier stifled a protest, mentally registering a vow that

he would secure another Jehu while he dwelt at Arncliffe.

"Beg pardon," said Warren, briefly. "I was thinking of the outlook."

"Your thoughts take an unnecessarily active form," growled the lawyer.

"The fact is, Mr. Aingier, I was wondering who would be my new employer. You see it is a serious thing for me."

"At present I am in charge of the estate as resident trustee, and it will certainly be a most serious thing for you if you throw me out of this infernal conveyance!" was the unexpected retort.

"I suppose some distant cousin will get the title and the bulk of the property?" persisted Warren.

"The title becomes extinct, there being no direct descendant of his lordship," the lawyer answered dryly. "You, as agent, know well enough that the estate is not entailed. Lord Arncliffe was what is styled a self-made man. He could, if he chose, leave everything he possessed to you, Mr. Harry Warren."

"By gad! No such luck!"

Warren rolled his tongue in his mouth. He collected rents amounting to ten thousand a year. Thrice that sum came from cotton and cloth mills in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the deceased Earl was credited with enormous deposits of ready money in two banks.

Aingier enjoyed the analysis of Warren's feelings. How this beefy youngster would revel in the delights of millionairedom! Already the mare was lifting her head under the urging of the reins.

"Failing you," he went on, "his lordship might devise his money to establishing a home for idiots."

"Don't be severe on me, Mr. Aingier. I am a bit upset by to-day's events, and I assure you there is not the slightest danger in sitting behind a quiet animal like this. All I want to say is that I hope, whoever succeeds to the property, it will make no difference to me."

"When I was a young man I gave no heed to considerations of that sort. I always endeavored to serve my employers faithfully and well, trusting to my services to secure my position."

Harry Warren would indeed have been slow-witted if he misapprehended this tart rejoinder. For the remaining quarter of a mile his nervous companion had no occasion for further protest. It was a pleasant night for a drive, and the lawyer recovered his equanimity before they reached the house.

Edith Holt, standing near the door after Lester had left her, heard the approaching vehicle. She recognized the sound of the wheels, and wondered idly why Warren had brought the solicitor by a circuitous way from the station.

She greeted Aingier cordially, telling him that Mrs. Warren, sorely tried by the Earl's sudden death, was compelled to retire, and had requested her to await his arrival.

Instantly Warren began to reckon the sequence of events. When had his mother seen Edith? It was evident that the latter had cut short her conversation with Lester. He was mistaken. Mrs. Warren, completely prostrated, had left a message for Miss Holt with a footman, but the belief served to banish her son's ill humor.

The old man seemed to be delighted that he was to have Miss Holt's company while he partook of some supper. He promised to join her immediately, and Harry Warren, anxious for a word, seized the moment's interval afforded by the safe transference of the solicitor's baggage to his room.

"Edith," he whispered, "don't forget that Mr. Aingier is a trustee. He can do a lot for us."

"In what way?" she asked.

"Well, he can smooth away difficulties, you know. You should — be quite nice to him." He nearly said "play up to him," but the words faltered on his tongue. The girl seemed to be so lost in the great sorrow of her benefactor's fate that even he felt the jar of the suggestion.

"Of course, I will endeavor to make him comfortable," she said simply. "But I have had a long

talk with Dr. Lester, and I am profoundly moved by Lord Arncliffe's extraordinary death. I fear I shall prove a very indifferent hostess to-night, Harry."

Now, the last thing a man of Warren's shifty disposition expected was this candid admission. It astounded him. A new-born tact induced him to be content with a growling comment about "interference by outsiders."

"You and Dr. Smalley are quite mistaken in that respect," she assured him earnestly. "Dr. Lester has been quite frank with me. His presence, as you are aware, was a sheer accident, and it is still more extraordinary that for some years he should have been engaged in the research planned by his lordship in West and Central Africa. You have heard me speak of it — the malarial mosquito, you remember. Dr. Lester forgot Sir William Bradshaw's new title. Indeed, he thinks he never heard of it, which was quite possible for a man who lived during months at a time on the head waters of the Niger. He is recognized as a great authority on — poisons."

She dwelt solemnly on the dread word. — Warren's natural petulance resented the certainty of her convictions, nor was he pleased by her defense of Lester.

"Between Lester and Aingier we are in for a fine old scandal," he said with a scowl.

"Mr. Aingier? What does he know about it?"

"Mr. Aingier will tell you himself, my dear young lady," said the solicitor, speaking from the open doorway. He had overheard Warren's exclamation, and the latter, somewhat abashed, drove off to the stables in sulky silence.

Lester, stepping out briskly, met a keeper with a dog, who questioned him as to his business. He satisfied the man's doubts, and thinking it was unusual, to say the least, that a visitor leaving the Hall by the proper road at such an hour should be called on to explain his presence, produced a cigar-case and invited the keeper to accompany him as far as the gate.

In a quiet country place unwonted excitement will loosen tongues more than ordinarily cautious. "Velveteens" was no exception to the rule.

"His lordship was what people call a recluse, sir," he said. "Nobody, not even a village tradesman, was allowed to approach the Hall without his permission. There was never any company. His lordship took his pleasure either in readin' or writin'. Sometimes, on a fine mornin', he would sit for hours on a canvas chair hidden by bushes and watch the birds and rabbits in the woods."

"He was a man after my own heart."

"I shouldn't have thought that, sir," said the keeper with a canny humor in his tone.

"You say that because you saw me escorting Miss Holt just now?"

"Mebbe I did, sir."

"There is no doubt about it. You were crouching behind the largest of three elms and holding your dog by the neck lest he should run out into the open."

"Phew!" whistled the keeper. "Who'd ha' thought you could spot me like that?"

"You fancy I would make an expert poacher, ch? Well, if Lord Arncliffe forbade the killing of game, I shouldn't carry two, if not more, young rabbits in my coat pocket. Have another cigar to smoke before you go to bed. Good night."

"Good night, sir, and thank you kindly. You're a rum un, you are!" added the man under his breath.

Although Lester had amused himself at the rustic's expense, his reflections were serious enough as he neared the village. Edith Holt, growing calmer after the discomfiture of Lizzie the kitchen-maid, was able to add nothing to Lord Arncliffe's nebulous theory that he was being done to death. Striving to lead her from a distracting topic, Lester exerted himself to make their chat more general in character. He spoke of himself and his aims in life, knowing full well that the girl would repay his confidences by her own simple story.

She was the daughter of an English classical

tutor who contracted a marriage somewhat late in life with a woman belonging to a poor and proud Channel Islands family.

"My great-grandfather was a Rochambert, an *emigré*, who married Mademoiselle Helène de Grammont, and I have been told that in a famous private collection in London there is a miniature of my great-grandmother to which I bear a remarkable likeness," she said.

"I can fully credit the statement," put in Lester, smiling in the darkness at his recollection of the bewitching "marquise" of the afternoon.

"I once told dear Lord Arncliffe about it," she continued, "and if I didn't so want to cry I could laugh now at the way in which the other wealthy connoisseur fenced with him when he wrote offering to buy it. Neither would sell, but each wanted to purchase the other's complete cabinet. Soon my poor Helène de Grammont was swamped in the galaxy of stars which illuminated the letters. You see, each collector tried, with the most elaborate courtesy, to show his rival that his own gallery of celebrities was so nearly perfect that it was a pity to withhold trifling exceptions from its completion, especially when price was no object."

"Would not *you* have been the most suitable person to buy your great-grandmother?"

"Ah, you know little of the ways of collectors.

Half the joy of ownership consists in the knowledge that you have something another man wants and cannot obtain."

The girl's lively wit made her possible engagement to a man of Harry Warren's type wholly incomprehensible to Lester. He paid little heed to the plausible explanation that a secretary and amanuensis might well regard the estate agent as a desirable spouse. Unreasonable though the feeling was, Lester longed to kick Warren for his impertinence in asking this spirituelle, graceful creature to be his wife. He had no manner of doubt that such was the position between these two. Even now, when the fragrance of her presence was gone, and her clear sweet voice was only a memory, Lester was furiously, inexplicably angry with Warren. The absurd fit passed, however, and he laughed at his own folly. It was in a state of placid good humor that he entered the bar of the "Fisherman's Rest," where "Jolly Jim" and his sturdy poacher acquaintance were far more eager to learn details of the sad end of the giant trout than to glean gossip from the Hall, even if Lester was disposed to give it.

The hour of ten disposed of external visitors, and Lester yielded so far to a personal curiosity as to ask the landlord if he knew whether or not Harry Warren was engaged to be married.

Jones laughed loudly. "Engaged?" he bellowed.

"By gum, engaged isn't the word, sir! He's hot, is that young man, very hot! But, mark me, he'll get into deep watter if he isn't careful. I say nowt about Betsy Spence or Polly Renwick, nor do I reckon much on Mary Brown's affair; but when it comes to playin' fast an' loose wi' sike a lass as May Mannering, why, my name isn't J. J. if she don't bring him up wi' a tight line."

Lester suddenly found the conversation disagreeable. Was Edith Holt the latest fancy of this village Lothario? The mere idea was nauseating. He must to bed and dispel these vapors. When all was said and done, how did it concern him?

About one o'clock in the morning, Aingier, a light sleeper at any time, but rendered more than ordinarily wakeful by a long journey, the loss of his friend, and a certain air of mystery attached to a professional incident which might otherwise be colorless, thought he heard some person walking stealthily along the corridor in which his room was situated.

Notwithstanding his nervousness about spirited horses and high-perched dog-carts, the old lawyer was plucky enough in other respects. He sprang up with remarkable alertness for one of his years, opened the door noiselessly and looked out. The corridor was dark, and, as far as he could judge, untenanted.

"I don't remember having heard of a night watchman being employed here," he communed, "and it is a queer hour for any one to be wandering about the house."

He closed the door again, turned up the gas and dressed partially. He had the student's habit of reading late at night. If he tackled a stiff book for an hour the effort might induce sleep. His hobby, strangely enough, was ship-building; within a few minutes he was deeply immersed in a recent treatise on naval architecture.

Then came that soft, guarded tread again, which, were it not for the creaking age of the oak floor, must have passed unheard. This time Aingier was prepared. He flung his bedroom door wide, and the flood of light from within fell on Harry Warren, standing, pale and open-mouthed, in the corridor. He was without his boots; he carried an extinguished candle in his left hand, with his right arm he encircled a sleepy-eyed puppy.

"What on earth have you been doing?" demanded Aingier sharply.

"I — I went to find — this little chap," said Warren confusedly, his naturally red face flaming back from white to brick color.

"Hunting for a dog at this hour? Absurd!"

"Really — I lost him. He ran out of my room, and — I had to follow him."

Aingier glanced at his watch. "You followed him for half an hour?" he cried with increasing suspicion in his voice.

"I — don't understand you."

"My words are exceedingly plain. You passed my door exactly thirty-two minutes since."

"That I swear I did not," cried Warren with more self-possession. "My room is on the next floor, and I — followed the dog along several passages until I caught him. This is the nearest way back."

"Then who passed here earlier?"

"I don't know. Shall I search the upper floors to see if any one is about?"

"It seems to me that there are some extraordinary happenings in this house!" snapped Aingier, without answering Warren's question directly.

The younger man appeared to be annoyed too. "There is nothing very odd about a young dog wandering a bit," he said brusquely.

"That puppy is nearly sound asleep. He wants to run nowhere," growled the lawyer.

"I have been nursing him, you see."

"You impress me as a tender-hearted person. May I ask if your nocturnal rambles have ended?"

"I tell you I have not passed your door before! You can believe me or not, just as you please," said Warren, and he stalked off.

For some considerable time thereafter Aingier tried to guess the true reason of Harry Warren's nocturnal prowling, for he dismissed the excuse of the straying puppy as a stupidly conceived pretext.

Warren himself, though vexed and somewhat frightened because he was discovered, was far more perturbed to think that another had passed along the corridor at the time stated by the keen-witted old solicitor. Who could it have been? What was the secret watcher's object? Harry Warren did not sleep until long after he had restored the puppy to its dam, lying cosily amid the straw of a distant stable.

CHAPTER IV

FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS A YEAR

ALTHOUGH his rest had been disturbed, there was no trace of lassitude in the old lawyer's appearance when he entered the breakfast-room next morning.

Mrs. Warren was there to greet him with her stately courtesy, in which a certain assertion of her own important position in the household was blended with recognition of one who was not only Lord Arncliffe's legal adviser, but also trustee of the estate.

"I trust you are better this morning, Mrs. Warren," said Mr. Aingier, cheerfully. "You must not let his lordship's death depress you too greatly. He was an old man, you know, old enough to make you and me feel quite youthful."

"Death is always a terrible thing," she replied, "and its terror is added to if there is even a suggestion of foul play."

"Oh, that is the last thing you should think of. Our poor friend was slightly eccentric, eh? It is probable that all these disturbing rumors will be set at rest within the next twenty-four hours. By the way, has Miss Holt breakfasted yet?"

"I do not know, Mr. Aingier."

"Will you ask her to favor me with her company, in any case? And — er — I might mention that I am telegraphing to my wife to come here to-day and bear the young lady company during this trying time. In future, we three will take our meals together."

Mrs. Warren had the rare gift of not asking questions. She smiled pleasantly, and contented herself with saying that she hoped Mr. Aingier would tell her instantly if the servants failed to execute his commands. Many housekeepers might have wondered why Lord Arncliffe's representative should be so concerned about the welfare of a girl who was only an amanuensis. If Mrs. Warren indulged in any natural speculation on the point she uttered no word. She passed from the room with a quiet jingle of her inseparable keys.

Soon Edith appeared, pale but delightfully fresh-looking, wearing an unrelieved black dress which supplied a wonderful setting to the sunlit glory of her hair.

"I could almost condemn you to wear black for the remainder of your life, it becomes you so well, Miss Holt," said the lawyer, gallantly.

"I am beginning to wear it with a frequency that is saddening," was her quiet answer.

But Aingier was not to be deterred from his

avowed object. Some part of the gloom which enshrouded Arncliffe Hall this bright morning must be banished.

"Of course you are greatly grieved by the suddenness of yesterday's event," he said. "Knowing your loneliness, I have asked Mrs. Aingier to come here for a few days."

"That is indeed kind and thoughtful of you. But why should my poor little troubles be allowed to interfere with Mrs. Aingier's arrangements? It will disturb her greatly to travel from Alnwick. And I suppose I must leave Arncliffe soon. May I remain until after the — the —" The blue eyes became a deeper shade. Her voice faltered. She must have yielded to the overwhelming sense of her own utter isolation had not the old man caught her by the shoulder.

"Now you are talking nonsense!" he cried. "You have known me some years. Surely you can trust me?"

"Yes, indeed. I have not forgotten your kind words last night."

"Yet you did not believe me, it seems. I told you not to bother your pretty head in the slightest degree as to the future, and now I find a disconsolate little maid to greet me, instead of the lively young party I expected to cheer my breakfast."

"Please forgive me. I am so sorry. I —"

"No excuses, and no more tears. I have ordered breakfast for two. You will oblige me by sitting down and showing that your early morning in the garden has not destroyed your appetite."

"You saw me, then?"

"Who could help it? Even if the rose-trees had hidden you, Mr. Warren's desperate anxiety to overtake you would have revealed your whereabouts."

A little smile brought a faint blush to her white cheeks. "At any rate I shall not lack friends," she murmured.

"No, indeed," was the gruff comment, and Edith was surprised by the lawyer's emphasis.

"What did Mr. Warren say to manifest his friendliness?" he went on.

She flushed still more deeply. "I ought to tell you, I think," she said, with a hesitancy that did not escape the keen old eyes. "Mr. Warren has asked me more than once of late to marry him. He renewed his proposal this morning."

"A highly appropriate time, indeed! And what was your answer? You are your own mistress, but I hope you will not refuse me your confidence."

"Why should I? I have very few friends. You are the only person I can speak to on such a matter. I cannot help feeling grateful to Mr. Warren, but I have told him that the present was no time for such considerations."

"In other words, you did not decline the proffered honor?"

The lawyer, from sheer force of habit, could scarce control the cross-examining ring of his voice.

Again Edith looked her surprise. "I found it hard to be as decided in my answer as would have been the case under different circumstances. Though it was not, perhaps, in the best of taste on his part to discuss the subject at such an hour, I cannot but appreciate the kindness which prompted a renewal of his offer. However, I do not think I shall ever marry Mr. Warren."

"I should think not, indeed! It is like his confounded impudence even to dream of it. He must be an idiot!"

Whatever her sentiments toward a declared admirer, it is not in feminine nature for a girl to regard as an idiot one who has given so convincing a proof of his intelligence as to be most anxious to wed her.

"I think you are rather unjust," said Edith, disconsolately. "After all, I am a poor, friendless girl, and although my feelings do not permit me to accept Mr. Warren's proposal, I should be none the less grateful. I am sure his only idea was to let me know that I need not be without a protector."

"Fiddlesticks! When you grow a little older, my dear, you will learn to regard all your fellow-

creatures with suspicion. Besides, how dare you say you are friendless? Doesn't a certain old fogy named Aingier count for anything?"

"You tell me to mistrust all my fellow-creatures," retorted Edith.

"Ah! That is more like your old self. Of course I am the exception that proves the rule. In any case, please do not listen to any proposals of marriage just at present. For all you can tell, our dear old friend may have left you a snug little fortune; and, though I know you too well to suppose that monetary questions would influence you in the slightest degree, yet experience has taught me that in the first flush of a bereavement women are apt to attach an altogether exaggerated value to any trivial act of kindness or expression of sympathy."

"I have the best of reasons for knowing that I have nothing to expect from Lord Arncliffe's estate," said Edith, with a wan little smile. "I owe that dear old man even more than you can guess, but it was thoroughly understood between us that whatever benefits I was to receive from him would be conferred during his lifetime."

"What do you mean?" demanded the lawyer, sharply. "Has Lord Arncliffe made any fresh will since I was here last?"

"Why, no, I do not think so. But —"

"Then don't talk nonsense, child. I find I must

clear the air a little. Kindly send Mrs. Warren and her son, and Simpson, Lord Arncliffe's valet, here to me. And, of course, come back yourself."

Edith looked somewhat astonished, but rose obediently to execute his wishes.

Left to himself, Aingier indulged in something resembling a most un-lawyer-like chuckle. "As well now as later," he murmured. "And I think this will put a spoke in that bull-headed booby's wheel. He might have broken my neck, confound him!"

The old solicitor had never had an exalted opinion of Harry Warren, and the too-exhilarating drive of the previous night had put a seal to the instinctive dislike. "No," he continued, with a grim smile, "I don't think we shall hear any more of Master Harry's pretensions."

He took a document from his breast pocket and studied it with much satisfaction. He was still engaged in this seemingly pleasant task when the door opened and Mrs. Warren entered, impassive as ever, followed by Edith, and Simpson, the deceased peer's attendant.

"You wished to see me, I understand?" said Mrs. Warren. "I am sorry that my son is not in the house at the moment."

"Oh, never mind; his presence is not really necessary. Please take a chair. And you too, Simpson."

Mrs. Warren bowed and sat down, while Simpson poised himself perilously on the edge of a seat. He knew his place, even if the solicitor were pleased to treat him so civilly. One wonders what happens when a genuine English servant of the upper class meets his employers in the next world.

"I have requested your attendance," explained Mr. Aingier, looking at them severely over the edge of the manuscript, and speaking in dry, professional tones, "in order to communicate to you the terms of the late Lord Arncliffe's will. Under ordinary circumstances I should, as is usual, have deferred this melancholy duty until after my dear old friend had been laid to rest, but in view of certain directions left by his lordship I think it better that those interested should be acquainted with his testamentary dispositions at once."

He coughed authoritatively. The others sat in breathless surprise, and the lawyer went on: "I think I may say, without disrespect, that his lordship, like all the rest of us, indulged certain little amiable fads; and while I am proud to believe that my firm enjoyed his entire confidence, it was his lordship's pleasure to draw up his will without legal assistance. It is, therefore, a holograph will, but while it is not, perhaps, set out as I could wish" (that was to say, Lord Arncliffe had condensed into one page what might very well have been said in

twenty), "it is, I think, sufficiently clear. The terms are as follows:

"This is the last will and testament of me, William Bradshaw, Baron Arncliffe, of Arncliffe Hall in the county of Northumberland. I give and devise to my legal adviser and esteemed friend, Thomas Aingier, (ahem! ahem!) solicitor, of Grey Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, the sum of one thousand pounds and the entire contents of my wine-cellars. I give and bequeath to my housekeeper, Adelaide Warren, the sum of one thousand pounds and my house in Arncliffe village known as Briar Lodge, with the grounds appertaining thereto. And, in further recognition of her services, I direct my trustees and executors, their heirs and assigns, to pay to the said Adelaide Warren the sum of one hundred pounds *per annum* during her lifetime."

Aingier paused for a moment. Mrs. Warren put a tremulous hand to her eyes, but recovered herself immediately. She was exceedingly pale. Probably she had not expected such generosity from her late master. The lawyer continued:

"To my attached friend and faithful servant, David Simpson (a strangled sob came from the old valet), the sum of one hundred pounds, all my wearing apparel and a cottage on my estate to be selected by my trustees. I further direct that a sum of one pound weekly shall be paid to the said David Johnson during his lifetime. It is my wish that all the above-mentioned legacies be paid free of duty."

Then Mr. Aingier focused the paper in a clear light and read, very slowly:

"I leave the entire residue of my estate, real and personal, to my secretary and amanuensis, Edith Holt, whom I have long

regarded as a beloved daughter. I make this bequest in the firm conviction that she will make good use of my money, retain, as far as practicable, my present establishment, take loving care of the artistic treasures accumulated at Arncliffe, and carry out, by personal interest and endowment, the investigations which have occupied the concluding years of my life. My personal advice to her is not to marry. Should she, however, elect to enter the married state, I trust she will be guided in the choice of a husband by qualities of mind rather than body, by attainment rather than inherited rank. I appoint the aforesaid Thomas Aingier and Edith Holt sole trustees and executors of this my will, and I revoke all former wills and codicils."

The lawyer's crisp tones ceased. An awesome hush fell on the little gathering. Simpson, with bowed head, and tears trickling down his furrowed cheek, had probably heard little since the mention of his own name. Mrs. Warren, who exhibited marvelous self-control, had laid a motherly hand on Edith's shoulder, but the young girl who suddenly found herself the inheritor of wealth indeed "beyond the dreams of avarice" sat with blanched cheeks and startled eyes, her lips quivering with an emotion that tried vainly to find expression in words.

"Come, come, my dear Miss Holt," began the lawyer, soothingly, "you must not break down. After all —"

"You don't understand!" she gasped, as though the words restored her faculties. "It is all a terrible mistake! He did not mean me to have it."

"Oh, yes, indeed he did," retorted Aingier with

decision. "But pray calm yourself. There is, I regret to say, a codicil, added by Lord Arncliffe a month ago, which I have yet to read."

"Ah!" exclaimed Edith. The truant color did not return to her cheek, but she smiled bravely at her old friend. He smiled back reassuringly.

"A moment and I shall have finished," he said. Then he bent over the paper again:

"This is a codicil to the will of me, William Bradshaw, Baron Arncliffe, of Arncliffe Hall in the County of Northumberland, the said will bearing date 23rd of July, 190— I have reason to believe that poison has been administered to me, and that I shall owe my death to that cause. I hereby direct my trustees and executors as aforesaid to pay the sum of ten thousand pounds to the person or persons who shall, in their opinion, be mainly instrumental in discovering the person by whom such poison may have been administered, and this without regard to the question whether such poison has been given to me wilfully or otherwise. And I further direct that as soon as shall be convenient after my death a post-mortem examination of my remains shall be made by some specialist of standing, preferably the expert employed in such cases by the Home Office."

During this recital the valet, Simpson, listened with rapt attention. Now he sprang to his feet with an exclamation that startled even Mrs. Warren out of her habitual calm.

"I knew it!" he cried. "By Heaven, I knew it! My poor old master was murdered!"

"Will you kindly be quiet, Simpson?" said Aingier, sternly.

The man hesitated, but the habit of subordination was strong, and he relapsed into silence, only glowering sullenly around him as though he expected to find the murderer within his reach.

"I need hardly say," continued the solicitor, "that I do not believe there is the smallest foundation for this unfortunate notion of Lord Arncliffe's. People who pursue gruesome studies such as toxicology are apt to harbor morbid ideas, just as those who are always dipping into medical works imagine themselves to be afflicted with all sorts of diseases. However, Lord Arncliffe's wishes must be carried out; and I have already communicated with Sir Henry Mathieson, the Home Office analyst, from whom, no doubt, I shall hear in the course of the day. Meanwhile, it is desirable that scandal should be avoided if possible, and I hope that no one — you hear me, Simpson? — no one, I say, will discuss anything that has passed between us."

"Very good, sir," replied the man, humbly. "But —" and there was a note of peasant obstinacy in his voice —"I know my master was poisoned. He told me so himself — told me almost to the day when he expected to die. And if it costs me every penny I owe to his goodness, I'll never rest until I've brought his murderer to the gallows!"

CHAPTER V

WARREN OBJECTS

Mrs. Warren and the valet had retired, but Aingier signed to Edith to remain. When they were alone he strove to rally her into a less despondent mood.

"Upon my word," he cried, "for a young lady who has just come into forty-odd thousands a year you are not unduly jubilant."

But Edith could not respond to his mood.

"Not even forty thousand pounds a year can help me to disguise the fact that I am in great trouble," she murmured brokenly. "I have grave reason to believe that had Lord Arncliffe lived he would have made another will of very different significance to that which you have just read."

"Well, then, let us be thankful he didn't," retorted the lawyer, somewhat brusquely. "I don't mean we should be glad he didn't live, but that he didn't make another will. I'm sure he could not have improved upon this one. What possible foundation have you for what you say?"

"I cannot tell you exactly," she faltered; "the

secret is not my own. But I was so unfortunate as to vex Lord Arncliffe very much some few weeks ago, and, although he treated me with the greatest kindness, he gave me clearly to understand that I must not expect to benefit in any way under his will."

"Strange," said Mr. Aingier, musingly. "When did this most potent secret event occur?"

"About six weeks since."

"And it is scarcely a month since he added the codicil to his will. My dear child, if he had intended to cut you out of his will he would have done so then."

"He might have forgotten," protested Edith, with a truly feminine lack of the sense of proportion.

"Forgotten that you were his heiress! Nonsense! In any case — I am an old fool! people do forget sometimes. Lord Arncliffe left a letter with me to be given to you privately after his will was read, and here am I keeping it in my pocket when it may be the key to the mystery which is troubling your little head so much. Here it is. Now just see whether it throws any light on the subject."

Edith opened the letter in silence. For a moment the sight of the well-remembered handwriting so blurred her eyes with emotion that she could not read a line. Then the words focused into coherence, and, as she realized their import, her face

lightened into such happiness that the tears burst forth afresh.

"Oh, Mr. Aingier," she sobbed, "now, indeed, I know that all is well."

"I must say you have a remarkable way of showing it. However, you certainly look more like a residuary legatee than you did five minutes ago. So everything is all right?"

"Look!"

She handed him the letter and he, adjusting his glasses, read it aloud as people do whose eyes are not so young as they used to be:

My Dear Child:

Forgive an old man for the prank he has played upon you. I was stupid enough to wish to test you, though I might have known that you would follow the nobler course whatever the cost to yourself. You will know ere you read this that I have made you my heiress. I need not tell you to use the wealth entrusted to you wisely and generously; and if unselfishness and purity of heart have their reward on earth I need not wish you happiness. Think kindly sometimes of your old friend,

Arncliffe.

"A very sensible letter," commented the lawyer, "though I don't know what on earth it means. Still, that doesn't matter. Now I think, for the time being, we had better forget you are so important a personage as Miss Holt of Arncliffe Hall, and then I can give orders which I shall expect to be obeyed. My commands are that you go and bathe those

eyes, which are not so bright as I like to see them, and then take a run in the park and try if the wind cannot blow some roses into those pale cheeks."

"Very well, I will, indeed, obey you. But is there anything I can do for you first?"

"No, my dear. It is twelve o'clock now, and at two I must meet Mrs. Aingier at the station. Meanwhile I shall stroll into the village and see if I can come across this Dr. Lester who has so upset everybody."

Edith, far too confused to pay heed to his words, hastened to her room.

In a few minutes Aingier set out briskly, and as luck would have it he encountered the object of his search strolling in the direction of the trout stream, his purpose betrayed by the creel and rod he carried. Well-dressed strangers were not so plentiful in the little Northumberland village that there was much likelihood of a mistake; and although this bronzed, rather distinguished-looking individual smacked more of the military man than of the medico, the lawyer accosted him without any misgivings.

"Pardon me, have I the pleasure of addressing Dr. Lester?"

"That is my name," was the smiling answer.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Aingier, and I had the honor to act as the late Lord Arncliffe's legal adviser. I am anxious to consult

you as to the circumstances of his lordship's death. I am the more pleased to meet you because I understand you are the gentleman who so successfully carried out certain bacteriological researches in which Lord Arncliffe was deeply interested."

"I never saw Lord Arncliffe in his life," replied the other, "although, in the sense that we corresponded with each other voluminously, we were somewhat intimate some years since. As you are probably aware, he took a keen interest in toxicology; and I have devoted some little attention to that branch of medical science —"

"That is really the point upon which I wished to have your advice," interrupted the lawyer. "You made an examination of Lord Arncliffe's body, did you not?"

"I was certainly present soon after he died," replied Lester, "but I retired almost immediately in favor of his regular medical attendant — who, I may say, treated me with rather scant courtesy."

"Dr. Smalley is an old woman!"

"I should heartily agree with you, were it not contrary to professional etiquette."

"However, you made a grave suggestion as to the cause of Lord Arncliffe's death?"

"My dear sir," rejoined Lester, "you must be aware that neither I nor any other can decide in such a case without a thorough investigation. It

merely happened that the very cursory examination I made revealed certain indications which led me to suspect poisoning. It is not impossible that I was mistaken, though I do not think so. Nevertheless, it was my duty to mention my suspicions."

"Then your view is —"

"My view is that my responsibility in the matter is at an end. Dr. Smalley is, I presume, a reputable practitioner. If Lord Arncliffe's relatives are satisfied there is no more to be said. From what I hear, however, it appears to be a case for inquiry. Personally, I have not the least doubt that there will be an inquiry."

"There are no relatives. The matter rests with me. To be frank, Dr. Lester, my principal object in coming to see you was to ask you to say nothing about it for the present. You may feel assured that there will be a full investigation. In fact, Sir Henry Mathieson, the Home Office analyst, arrives to-morrow for that purpose."

"Ah!" murmured the young doctor, thoughtfully. "I should rather like to be present."

"Why, indeed, if Sir Henry has no objection —"

"Oh, Mathieson and I are old friends. I was a pupil of his."

"Then I will let you know. If, as I hope, Lord Arncliffe's death turns out to have been due to

natural causes, there need not, of course, be any publicity."

"Well," said Lester, dryly, "as it is current in the village that Lord Arncliffe was poisoned, shot, stabbed, strangled, and blown up with dynamite, I fear there is likely to be some little publicity. It seems to be a matter of common knowledge that he suspected an attempt was being made upon his life."

"But this is terrible!" cried Aingier, almost wringing his hands.

"A mere nine days' wonder," Lester assured him, with that serene philosophy which enables us to bear up so well under other people's troubles.

"Nine days' wonders last about three generations in a village like this," retorted the old solicitor shortly. "Well, I must say good-by now, Dr. Lester, as I have an appointment. I shall, no doubt, have the pleasure of seeing you at the Hall to-morrow."

They had wandered into Arncliffe Park during their conversation, and Lester strolled on unthinkingly, though the trout stream lay behind him. He was recalling the events of the last twenty-four hours, but, strangely enough, the mystery of Lord Arncliffe's death had no place in his thoughts. For him the events of a memorable day all resolved themselves into one picture — a vision from Trianon of old, a vision with hair of ruddy brown with sun-

shine tangled in it; the eyes a mystery behind a veil of azure crystal; the mouth a love-poem, and the delicate curves of the oval face —

George Lester was, in fact, suffering from a disease not dreamed of in all his bacteriology. The symptoms included an unreasoning but not the less intense hatred of Harry Warren; an earnest (and, of course, unselfish) desire that Miss Holt should not waste her affections on an unworthy object; and a species of mild delirium accompanied by hallucinations, in which Edith appeared as beaming at him across the breakfast-table, or waving a smiling farewell as he left her for the day's work at the laboratory. And then a memory of Harry Warren, with his insufferable air of proprietorship, would spoil it all.

Good heavens! what could such a woman find admirable in a clodhopper like that? Almost repulsive in appearance (this, by the way, was unjust, since Warren was well-looking enough, albeit of an animal type), with rather less brains than an ox. And then the grim humor of it all appealed and he reproached himself.

"What an idiotic frame of mind I am in!" he thought, smiling sourly. "I don't know how it is, but I'd give anything for a decent opportunity to punch that fellow's head!"

It was while Lester was giving utterance to this

kindly thought that he emerged into an open glade of the wood and found the object of his solicitude thirty paces in front of him, engaged in earnest conversation with Miss Holt.

Warren's voice was raised, though his words were indistinguishable; and there seemed to be something of agitation in the girl's manner. It came to Lester with a sharp pang that here was perhaps a lover's quarrel. For a moment he hesitated. Then he realized that to turn back would be a piece of gaucherie worthy of the despised Warren, so he made the best of an awkward situation and went forward.

The vision of Edith Holt pouring out the matutinal coffee had grown distressingly shadowy, and his heart had dropped down into his boots, a distance of rather more than a thousand miles. But he greeted the young people pleasantly enough, met Warren's black scowl with a smile of polite indifference, and would have passed on, had not Edith Holt given him a glance so pregnant with entreaty that he constituted himself her faithful knight on the spot. And lo! his heart bounded back those thousand miles and beat bravely in his bosom again. But the craving to assault and batter Warren remained painfully insistent.

Warren's attitude was not, indeed, calculated to allay that craving. His face was flushed with sullen

rage. There was open insolence in the baleful gaze he turned upon the interrupter of his tête-à-tête with Miss Holt.

"We seem fated to meet, Miss Holt, and, as usual, I am a trespasser," said Lester, gaily. He recked little of Warren's black looks, since Edith's glance told him so plainly that he was welcome.

An inarticulate growl broke from Warren's lips. Edith glanced at him in a haughty astonishment that was not lessened by the almost uncontrollable passion she saw depicted on his features. Now, indeed, Lester recognized the marquise of the *ancien régime*. The dainty head took a higher poise; the flower-like mouth hardened, and there was a note of freezing superiority in her voice as she addressed the young man who stood before her like a culprit, still sullen and glowering, yet not daring to meet her eyes.

"I need not detain you any longer, Mr. Warren," she said. "Dr. Lester, there is a gentleman at the Hall, Lord Arncliffe's solicitor, who is very anxious to see you. If you have nothing else to do, will you walk in that direction?"

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," he replied.

Edith instantly turned in the direction of the Hall, but Lester's quick ears told him that the discomfited agent did not move. It required little imagi-

nation to picture the malignant glance which followed them. Lester was happy enough to feel rather sorry for him. After all, poor devil! who could blame him for worshiping this divinity?

"Mr. Aingier went into the village in the hope of finding you," said Edith, "but I expect he will return soon."

"As a matter of fact, I have only recently left him," confessed Lester. "Nevertheless, I hope you will let me accompany you to the Hall."

Nothing was said of Warren's offensive behavior, but there was necessarily a tacit understanding; and Edith accepted the proffered escort with simple thanks. They talked little: the girl was overwrought, and Lester was tactful enough to realize that she was best left to herself. He took his leave, therefore, directly they came in sight of the house. And, though he parted from her with a strange reluctance, his blood tingled with most unscientific ardor when Edith gave him a grateful little pressure of the hand at parting.

Meanwhile, Harry Warren, nursing a deep wrath, awaited Lester's reappearance. Here was one fallen from the clouds, a possible and most dangerous rival. He meant to declare instant war.

Lester, contrary to his wonted habit, was so oblivious to his surroundings that it was only when he came right upon the other that he awoke from his

day-dreams. He had no desire to bandy words with Warren, whose face was a sufficient index of the fact that nothing would please him better than a quarrel. It is all well enough in the abstract to think of punching heads, but a gentleman does not act in that strenuous way unless he is absolutely forced to it. For Miss Holt's sake alone, if for no other reason, a stupid scuffle was to be avoided. Lester therefore nodded politely, and would have passed on, but the other seemed bent on provoking him.

"By this time you ought to be aware that these grounds are private," he said insolently.

"I am quite aware of the fact," rejoined Lester, quietly; "but I presume that both Mr. Aingier and Miss Holt have the privilege of admitting their acquaintances."

"And failing them, you come here to spy on your own account?" asked Warren, with a sneer.

"I am rather at a loss to understand you."

"Perhaps you will understand me when I say that if I catch you meddling in what does not concern you again it will be the worse for you."

Lester looked at him curiously. The flushed cheek and slightly thick speech seemed to point to something more potent than mere temper.

"My friend," he said calmly, "let me tell you that to a man of your build alcohol is absolutely poison."

Warren took a step forward. "Confound you! what do you mean?" he snarled.

"I mean that your neck is like your head — abnormally thick. One of these days you will die of apoplexy if you are not careful."

Lester never showed anger, but his mood was none the more benevolent on that account. And he had not forgotten that there were tears in Edith's eyes.

Warren clenched his fists, and his muscles tautened. Yet he did not strike. He had a fair enough share of brute courage, but there was something he did not understand in the cool, unruffled look of his opponent. He was like a wild beast held in check by the power of the human eye; and, with the wild beast's fear of an unknown force, he tried to lash himself into sufficient fury for attack. In his case the effort took the form of a volley of abuse.

Lester half turned away. His action was eloquent of unspoken contempt.

It was enough. The spell of those steady eyes was broken, and with a hoarse cry Warren sprang forward. Lester, seeing what was coming, stepped back lightly. The vicious blow just missed him. He countered, with a skill born of many a bout with the gloves.

It seemed, for an instant, that this unexpected reply was only a ward to gain distance, for Warren

did not even stagger. But it was only for an instant. Then his knees bent and he collapsed quietly into a limp heap.

Lester smiled grimly, stooped over his adversary, and proceeded to light a cigar. Master Warren would come to his senses in a minute or two, a trifle dazed, but not much the worse. And so it proved. The fallen hero rose to his knees presently. He was not absolutely certain what had happened, but evidently the placid-looking man with the cigar was in some way responsible for his discomfiture.

"You are going to have a very bad headache soon," remarked Lester, cheerfully, "and I rather think you will be sick. If you take my advice you will go home and get to bed. You may apologize for your conduct next time I see you. Can you walk?"

Warren struggled to his feet. He was very shaken, and pale.

"As I said, you may apologize later on," went on Lester. "As you do not seem to be in need of my professional assistance, I will bid you good day."

He walked slowly away, followed by certain assurances as to Warren's future intentions which it is not necessary to repeat. Lester smiled again pleasantly. Reflection, with its unkind candor, had not yet overtaken him.

"Useful blow, that, on the point of the jaw," he

murmured. "It doesn't leave any mark; and I should not have liked Edith to have seen him with a black eye. But I am glad I punched his head. It seems to have adjusted matters."

Clearly, George Lester was in an unusual frame of mind. Else why did he think of a girl whom he had seen twice in his life, as "Edith"?

CHAPTER VI

THE ADJOURNED INQUEST

There was an atmosphere of subdued activity, of hushed expectancy, in and about Arncliffe Hall. Near the main entrance groups of villagers discussed the situation in whispers, or listened, open-mouthed, to the astounding theories of local oracles. Each minute swelled the number of morbid curiosity-mongers. For twelve good men and true were to inquire into the circumstances surrounding Lord Arncliffe's death, and the place was all agog with excitement.

Harry Warren, indeed, made strenuous efforts to disperse the crowds which invaded the sacred precincts of the Hall. Nevertheless, though tenants to whom quarter-day was a period of humiliation shrank away from the presence of the dreaded agent, they only vanished from one spot to gather more thickly in another.

Joshua Perkins, cobbler and village Hampden, was in no small degree responsible for this contumacy. He pointed out that at an open court the rights of all were equal; and his spirited references

to wealthy drones who passed their time lolling in carriages received the usual enthusiastic approval of certain gentlemen who passed their time lolling in public-houses.

As a matter of fact, the question of admitting the general public, as distinct from any local magnates who might choose to be present, had already been decided by P. C. Fox, who, as sole representative of law and order in Arncliffe, naturally had charge of such arrangements. This intelligent officer realized that the circumstance of the inquest being held at the Hall called for the exercise of discretion, and he had made up his mind to exclude all who did not attain to a certain standard of respectability. What that standard was it is not necessary to mention, but it was not unconnected with a desire on the part of P. C. Fox to lay up an honorable competency for his declining years.

The inquest, adjourned a week previously, after the hearing of formal evidence of identification, was the inevitable corollary of the post-mortem examination — an examination from which Dr. Smalley, whose presence had been invited as a matter of professional courtesy, emerged nervous and crestfallen, while Lester and Sir Henry Mathieson exhibited, in contradistinction, the bland, decorously cheerful satisfaction of the scientist who has lighted upon an unusually interesting exhibition of some

rare phenomenon which he thoroughly understands.

The time arrived for the resumption of the inquiry; and the jury, looking more like condemned criminals than men who were to sit in judgment, shuffled into their places. There was, however, one exception to the general air of dejection. The unabashed Perkins was appointed foreman, and he intended to justify the liquid refreshment he had received and hoped to receive from his appreciative fellow-villagers.

For convenience, the proceedings were held in the library, and the unwonted scene offered ample scope to the reporters — impressionists from the great dailies — who would describe the glint of sunshine athwart the Coroner's desk in a column and the story of Lord Arncliffe's death in a phrase.

Mrs. Warren, the essence of dignified bereavement; her son, flushed with the effort to appear at his ease; Edith Holt, tremulous, but smiling wistful gratitude for the sympathy of Aingier and his wife; these were the chief personages present, and, for a background, the huddled servants and gaping yokels. There were, too, the doctors and a granite-faced man from Scotland Yard, but these last, impassive and apparently indifferent, added no touch of human interest to the scene.

The Coroner briefly recapitulated the formal

evidence taken at the previous sitting, and then recalled Simpson, the valet, who had deposed to finding Lord Arncliffe dead in his study.

"When did you last see Lord Arncliffe alive?" asked the Coroner.

"At five in the afternoon, sir."

"He did not appear to be unwell?"

"No, sir. He asked for his beef tea, and I went to the kitchen for it, but found that Miss Holt had already fetched it."

"Did Miss Holt usually give Lord Arncliffe his beef tea?"

"Yes, sir. I went back and just met her taking it in. She had been into the laboratory for some of his lordship's papers."

"Very well. Now, Mr. Simpson, you have been in Lord Arncliffe's employment for a very long period, have you not?"

"Thirty-eight years, sir. And a better master —"

"Quite so. Tell me, have you ever had reason to suppose that there was any one who bore a grudge against his lordship — in short, that he had an enemy?"

"No, sir," said the man, positively, "in all the years I served Lord Arncliffe, I don't believe he ever harmed so much as a fly. But I know he was poisoned, and I'll never forgive myself for not believing him when he told me so."

"Ah! he told you so. Please explain the circumstances to the jury as well as you can remember them."

"Well, sir, it was just after one of his lordship's fainting fits, and he said to me: 'Simpson,' said he, 'I'm being murdered!' Of course I was a bit taken aback, but I thought his mind was wandering a little, though he was a wonderful intelligent gentleman, for all his age, and I tried to speak cheerful like. 'Not a bit of it,' I told him. 'Your lordship will live to be a hundred yet, if you only do as Dr. Smalley tells you.'"

"And what did Lord Arncliffe reply?" asked the Coroner.

Dr. Smalley coughed modestly.

"If you will excuse me for using such language about a gentleman above my station, sir," answered Simpson, "his lordship replied that Dr. Smalley was a confounded old fool!"

With one exception, everybody tittered. The Coroner busied himself with some imaginary notes for a moment, and then continued his examination of the witness.

"Did Lord Arncliffe persist in his assertion that an attempt was being made to kill him?"

"Yes, sir. He said he would be a dead man within a fortnight."

"You did not mention this matter to anybody?"

"No, sir. His lordship forbade me to do so. He told me that nothing could save him, and he did not want to be bothered."

"But it was your duty to take some steps."

"I did not think for a moment it was true, but, in any case, I knew my place better than to interfere with his lordship's wishes."

"Very well," said the Coroner, wearily; "you can stand down." He knew the hopelessness of arguing with a witness of this stamp.

"Just hold on a moment," interrupted Perkins, the foreman. "Did you notice anything strange in the young lady's manner when she brought in his lordship's beef tea? Did she seem upset?"

"No, not then —"

"Has Miss Holt appeared to be upset at any time recently?" asked the Coroner, quickly.

"Well, sir," said Simpson, with some reluctance, "I thought she had been crying when I went in earlier in the day. And his lordship certainly spoke rather sharper than usual."

Edith, listening tensely, went deathly pale, and leaned forward as though eager not to miss a word. The fickle attention of the spectators was instantly concentrated on her. This callous scrutiny in itself was sufficient to deepen the agitation of a young girl suddenly placed in so trying a position. But, in

reality, she was oblivious to the glances leveled at her, and one person at least, the detective from Scotland Yard, noted the fact.

"You say Lord Arncliffe spoke sharply," continued the Coroner. "Can you tell me the substance of his conversation?"

"Why, sir, I was taking his lordship a letter, and Miss Edith — I'd scorn to listen, but the door was on the jar — said something about not letting a young life be ruined because of one false step. Then his lordship said: 'It's three hundred pounds now; next time it will be three thousand.'"

"And what did Miss Holt reply?"

"I didn't hear any more, sir. I knocked at the door and went in. It was then I noticed that the young lady seemed a bit upset."

"And that was all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, gentlemen," said the Coroner. "I propose to call the medical evidence, as I understand one of the witnesses is anxious to return to London. Sir Henry Mathieson!"

The Home Office expert stepped forward, the embodiment of that frock-coated urbanity which regards poor human clay as a mere adjunct of the laboratory. At this juncture, Inspector Hobson, the officer sent to Arncliffe by the Scotland Yard authorities, slipped quietly out of the room, taking

Mr. Aingier with him. He did not return until the evidence of the expert was nearly finished.

"I believe, Sir Henry, you conducted the post-mortem examination of Lord Arncliffe's body?" commenced the Coroner.

"That is so."

"Have you formed any opinion as to the cause of his lordship's death?"

"Yes; he unquestionably died of arsenical poisoning."

"And can you tell us, approximately, when the poison was administered?"

"I don't know," said Sir Henry, bluntly. "I found altogether twelve grains of arsenious acid in the abdominal viscera. Of that quantity the stomach contained nearly two grains, which were unabsorbed, and no doubt had been recently administered. In addition, there were rather more than four grains in the brain, and the latter fact proves conclusively that some considerable time elapsed between the first and the last doses."

"Arsenic is a cumulative poison, is it not?"

"Yes, but the quantities I have mentioned are absolutely preposterous. Arsenic is not, comparatively speaking, a rapid poison, but four grains alone would kill a man before a quarter of that amount found its way to his brain."

"Then what is your conclusion, Sir Henry?"

"I have reached none, excepting that death was due to arsenical poisoning. As you are no doubt aware, arsenic is highly irritant in its effects; we expect to find definite indications even in the case of a slight overdose. But Lord Arncliffe exhibited few of the usual signs, and none of them in a marked degree. In fact, I must confess myself at a loss to account for this exceptional absence of the ordinary symptoms."

Sir Henry Mathieson could afford to admit ignorance. That is one of the privileges of real knowledge. He retired, and Lester, taking his place, described how he had been called to see Lord Arncliffe, and how the slight irritation of neck and scalp had led him to suspect arsenical poisoning.

"I should like to add," he said, with a generosity which the fussy local practitioner scarcely deserved, "that had I been in regular attendance on Lord Arncliffe, and thus without an open mind on the point, these indications might possibly have escaped me. Lord Arncliffe was suffering from a form of heart disease which must inevitably have had a fatal termination at some early date. Under the circumstances, the very suddenness of his death pointed to natural causes."

"I presume, Dr. Lester, that you are in accord with Sir Henry Mathieson?"

"Entirely. Perhaps I should mention that

Lord Arncliffe was extremely emaciated. He was naturally a man of spare build, but Dr. Smalley tells me that the loss of flesh since he examined him about a month ago is remarkable."

"Is that a condition you would expect in a case of slow poisoning by arsenic?"

"Certainly; but the quantity of arsenic found in the body is not compatible with the theory of slow poisoning, nor are the other symptoms nearly so definite as they should be. I am afraid I can offer no suggestion, excepting that Lord Arncliffe was poisoned by arsenic, administered in some form not at present known to medical science."

The evidence of Dr. Smalley opened up fresh ground. He dealt lightly with his own failure to detect the presence of poison, but he had a great deal to say about the foibles and eccentricities of the deceased peer.

"He was a most difficult patient," he said. "Although I visited him frequently, he had a strong objection to discussing the state of his health, and, under no circumstances, would he take medicine in any form."

"Was he, of late years, what you would describe as a mentally vigorous man?"

"He was a man of high intellect and considerable attainments, and, in one sense, I should say his powers were retained to the last. But his conduct

in respect to the alleged poisoning points strongly, in my opinion, to mental derangement. We have the extraordinary codicil to his will, and on top of that he imparts his suspicions — to three persons. I understand — under a strict pledge of secrecy — all the time, mark you, without taking any steps for his protection and without seeking medical assistance. If we are to accept the evidence of the valet as to his lordship's estimate of my abilities," added Dr. Smalley with some bitterness, "it may account for his omission to make me acquainted with his suspicions, but one would surely expect him to seek some advice."

"Will you allow me to say, Mr. Coroner," interposed Lester, "that Dr. Smalley's general deductions are such as most medical men will indorse. But Lord Arncliffe was one of the greatest authorities on poisons, and eminently qualified to deal with his own condition. I do not think there is the shadow of a doubt that he knew the nature of the poison from which he was suffering, whether it was self-administered or not, and that he was perfectly aware no earthly skill could avail him."

"Is there no antidote?"

"I know of none to arsenic, except the stomach-pump," answered Lester, with decision. "When once a fatal dose has been absorbed into the system, the patient is doomed, and although certain drugs —

magnesia, hydrated sesquioxide of iron, and the like — are often exhibited as a forlorn hope, I have never known them do any good."

Lester retired, with an apology for his interruption, and Dr. Smalley, rather ruffled at this fresh instance of what he considered the younger man's interference, continued his evidence.

"Are we to assume, Dr. Smalley, that you consider it probable Lord Arncliffe was responsible for his own death?"

"I consider it highly probable. We have just been reminded of his attainments as a toxicologist, and I think you will agree with me that such studies are highly dangerous to a layman. Even from the little I have seen of his laboratory, I should imagine it contains sufficient poisons to destroy countless thousands of people. He may have taken some fatal draft by accident; he may have experimented upon himself with some newly discovered solution of arsenic. But his semi-mysterious references to an attempt upon his life certainly suggest the purposeless cunning of a deranged mind."

With this dignified pronouncement, Dr. Smalley stepped down, fairly well satisfied with himself, all things considered.

It was now the turn of Edith. As she moved forward to the witness-stand there was a little buzz of excitement.

CHAPTER VII

SOME DISQUIETING REVELATIONS

It was common knowledge that Lord Arncliffe had made her his heiress, and there are no conceivable circumstances under which a beautiful young woman with forty thousand a year is not an object of interest.

"Sweet young creature!" murmured women with marriageable sons.

"Peroxide of hydrogen, my dear!" whispered the mother of three hopeless daughters. "I expect her hair is nearly black at the roots."

Edith took her place with quiet dignity. Her cheeks remained colorless, and the fear that had come upon her when Simpson spoke of the conversation he had overheard still gripped her heart. But unconscious pride of blood kept her head erect, freed her voice from tremor, and gave her courage to return, at least with her eyes, the smile of kindly encouragement which met her as she passed close to Lester.

"I believe, Miss Holt, you acted as private secretary to the late Lord Arncliffe?" was the first query.

"Yes."

"How long were you employed in that capacity?"

"In the full sense, only about four years, but I have assisted him with his papers ever since he undertook my guardianship ten years ago."

"Then I presume you became Lord Arncliffe's amanuensis merely as a matter of what might be termed family arrangement?"

"Not at all. I owed my later education to him, but I had my living to earn, and, as I had some experience of his methods, he was good enough to engage me. Lord Arncliffe showed me unvarying kindness, and did not treat me as a servant; but he had strict ideas of business."

"You did not, then, regard yourself in the light of his heiress?"

"No. Such a thought never entered my mind. Lord Arncliffe had always impressed upon me that I must consider myself dependent on my own exertions."

"Now, Miss Holt, you have heard the evidence of the witness Simpson that you gave Lord Arncliffe his beef tea on the day of his death. Is that correct?"

"Yes; and it is also correct that I went into the laboratory on my way back for a book Lord Arncliffe wanted."

"Was the beef tea ever out of your possession

from the time the cook handed it to you until you brought it to Lord Arncliffe?"

"I am not sure. I could not find the book I was looking for, and I went to ask Lord Arncliffe where he had put it; but I cannot say whether I left the beef tea in the laboratory. If I did, it was not for more than a minute."

"Did Lord Arncliffe ever mention to you his belief that he was being poisoned?"

"Yes, several times within the last month. But his state of health was very low, and I really thought it was a delusion brought on by constant study of works dealing with toxicology. He seemed so positive, however, that I begged him to consult Dr. Smalley, but he said — he said —"

Edith hesitated in some confusion, and her pale lips parted into the ghost of a smile. Dr. Smalley, by some strange instinct conscious of impending calamity, wiped the perspiration from his brow, while a ripple of laughter went round the room.

"Go on, Miss Holt, go on," said the Coroner, encouragingly.

"He said that — that he himself knew more about the subject than any doctor."

Smalley recovered his self-possession. The crisis had passed.

Miss Holt was obviously keeping something back, but the Coroner was merciful. "And, as he

insisted that I should not speak of what he had told me, there was nothing more to be done," she added.

"But did you not think it your duty to take some steps in so serious a matter?"

"Lord Arncliffe would never have tolerated disobedience. Moreover, I did not regard it seriously. Had I done so I should, of course, have disregarded his prohibition."

"Do you think Lord Arncliffe was a man to commit suicide?"

"No, most decidedly not. He regarded self-destruction as a cowardly act under any circumstances. Nor do I imagine that he poisoned himself accidentally. He was always most scrupulously careful in handling poisons."

"Did anybody except Lord Arncliffe have access to the various poisons in his laboratory?"

"Only myself. All the drugs were kept under lock and key, and no servant, excepting Simpson, was allowed to enter the laboratory."

"But how came you to have access to all these poisons?"

Edith opened her eyes in astonishment. "I assisted Lord Arncliffe in his experiments," she explained. "I have done so for years. You must remember he was working for the good of humanity."

The girl saw nothing extraordinary in this, but

in the eyes of the jury — hopelessly thick-headed, as Coroner's juries often are — it made her a potential murderess at once. Perkins, the foreman, rubbed his hands. He intended to figure prominently in the public eye presently.

"I do not think we need trouble you any further, Miss Holt," said the Coroner.

"I presume, gentlemen," to the jury, "you have no questions to ask the witness?"

"Oh, yes, we have, begging your pardon," broke in Perkins, offensively. "We should like to know what the young lady and the old gentleman was quarrelin' about afore his lordship died."

"I certainly was not quarreling with Lord Arncliffe, then or at any other time," said Edith, haughtily. She did not flinch, but it was patent that she was agitated to a far greater degree than the occasion seemed to warrant.

The Coroner saw that she was overwrought, and decided to give her some little time to recover herself. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "I think we had better adjourn for luncheon now. No doubt, when the court reassembles, Miss Holt will explain any doubtful points to your satisfaction."

Edith retired to a private room with Mr. and Mrs. Aingier. When the solicitor's wife gave her a sympathetic squeeze of the arm, she promptly burst into tears.

"There, there, my dear!" said Mrs. Aingier soothingly.

Probably none but a woman knows precisely what "There, there!" means, but the formula appears to have a mysterious efficiency.

"Don't cry, my child," entreated the old lawyer. "Confound it! What does that idiot of a juryman mean by bothering you with his absurd questions? Things are coming to a pretty pass if you are to be badgered on account of an eavesdropping servant."

"I would not mind, Mr. Aingier, if it were only that," murmured Edith, tearfully; "but what Simpson says is true. I was discussing a very private matter with Lord Arncliffe — a matter which I must keep secret at any sacrifice."

"Well, my dear young lady, you are not compelled to tell your private affairs to a Coroner's jury, though, of course, secrecy often makes a mountain out of what is probably only a mole-hill. But what is this wonderful matter? Don't you think you had better let me judge what is best?"

Edith shook her head. "I am sorry," she faltered. "Don't think me ungrateful — you are so kind and good that I would tell you instantly if it only concerned myself. But the secret is not my own."

The solicitor was disappointed, even somewhat hurt. A man who has kept inviolable for years

whole cupboards' full of other people's family skeletons does not like his clients to withhold confidences. But he was mainly concerned because he foresaw that Edith's reticence would be productive of illimitable gossip.

However, he pursued the subject no further. Edith, under the combined influence of cheerful conversation and a glass of wine, which her friends insisted she should take, became more composed. When the court reassembled she was calm enough, at least, outwardly.

The Coroner, with a rather puzzled expression, was studying a slip of paper which had been handed to him by the London detective. But he spoke encouragingly enough to Edith.

"I hope, Miss Holt, we shall not have to detain you long. The witness Simpson has deposed that on the day of Lord Arncliffe's death he heard his lordship addressing you in tones rather at variance with his usual manner. As anything bearing on the mental condition of the deceased is important, the jury would like to hear from you exactly what took place."

The question was skilfully put. Edith began to think she had absurdly exaggerated the ordeal before her. But shrewd old Mr. Aingier metaphorically tore his hair; he knew that such suavity boded ill for a witness.

"Simpson has reported our conversation correctly," Edith answered. "Lord Arncliffe and I had merely reopened the discussion of some private business upon which we had a difference of opinion. Lord Arncliffe was at all times rather impatient of opposition, and no doubt he spoke more sharply than was his wont."

"May I ask the nature of that business? You are not, of course, compelled to answer the question if you do not wish to do so."

"The business was purely of a private nature."

"There was some reference to a sum of three hundred pounds. Was that an item of the business under discusion?"

"Yes," admitted Edith faintly, lifting startled eyes to the Coroner. The moment she was dreading had come at last. "Lord Arncliffe had lent — perhaps I should say given — me three hundred pounds some little time previously."

"For what purpose did he give you this money?"

"That, sir, is my business." The "marquise" spirit was beginning to assert itself.

Mr. Aingier rose to his feet with well-simulated indignation. "Surely, sir," he protested, "it is not extraordinary that Lord Arncliffe should give so paltry a sum as three hundred pounds to the lady he had chosen to inherit his vast wealth?"

"Not at all, Mr. Aingier," returned the Coroner. "Nevertheless, we must remember that he took pains to prevent Miss Holt from anticipating any such conclusion. I presume, Miss Holt, Lord Arncliffe was not in the habit of giving you such amount of money?"

"No."

"Nor anything approaching such an amount?"

"No. I had my salary, sixty pounds a year, and Lord Arncliffe occasionally gave me a check for ten or fifteen pounds. I had to entertain such guests as visited him, and it was his wish that I should dress suitably. The three hundred pounds were given at my earnest request. I required the money urgently, and Lord Arncliffe was the only person to whom I could turn."

"Very well. I have here a canceled check of Lord Arncliffe's for three hundred pounds, dated six weeks before he died. Would this represent the payment to you?"

A more skilled hand than the Coroner's revealed itself. Detective-Inspector Hobson was beginning to move.

"Yes."

"You collected the amount personally from the Alnwick branch of the Great Northern Bank?"

"Yes."

"All in gold?"

"Yes; I required it in gold." She was all spirit now. Those myosotis blue eyes had a glint of steel in them.

"A rather cumbersome method, I should imagine," commented the Coroner. He had been friendly disposed hitherto, but he began to feel nettled by the haughty indifference which had taken the place of maiden timidity.

"If you are suggesting that I asked for gold so that the money could not be traced," she said disdainfully, "I can only say that each attendant at the bank is acquainted with me."

The weather-cock sympathies of the crowd instantly veered towards Edith.

The Coroner, rather at a loss, pretended to busy himself with his papers, and a murmur of comment relieved the tension of the audience.

"She has soon acquired the forty-thousand-a-year manner!" was the common thought.

Yet each complacent critic asked: "Why did she, then a poor girl, want so much money?"

Edith's examination might have reached an abrupt conclusion, had not the watchful Hobson sent the Coroner another note. The official tones became ominously suave again.

"Pray do not misunderstand me, Miss Holt, I mentioned the matter because I understand that on another occasion you cashed a check of Lord

Arncliffe's for two hundred and fifty pounds, which was also paid in gold."

"Yes. It was distributed by Lord Arncliffe to relieve the winter distress in the district, and I fetched the money because Mr. Warren, the agent, was suffering from a riding accident."

"So the bank officials would not think this second application for a large sum of gold in any way strange?"

"I have not considered the possibility of the bank people presuming to comment upon any act of mine."

"No doubt. The signature to the check is presumably that of Lord Arncliffe; but the amount was filled in by yourself, was it not?"

Steel was striking flint now, and the sparks were flying.

Aingier had thought it wise that Edith should avoid the least appearance of concealment; but he thought it high time to protest.

"If your object is to prove that the check for three hundred pounds was improperly obtained by Miss Holt," he said severely, "I shall strongly advise her not to answer any further questions. You must be perfectly aware, sir, that such a line of cross-examination as you have pursued should have been preceded by a caution."

The Coroner felt the injury inflicted by so public

a rebuke. Much as he would have liked to assert the dignity of the court, policy dictated an attitude of conciliation. The lawyer was a mighty power in the county and could make things extremely unpleasant if he so listed.

"I fear I have expressed myself badly if I have given so unfortunate an impression," said the Coroner. "However, I will not trouble Miss Holt further; and I trust she will pardon me if in the performance of a public duty I have caused her any pain."

Edith bowed, and returned to her seat by Mrs. Aingier. In a sense the ordeal was a tonic. The scornful indignation excited by the Coroner's masked battery of innuendo was a far healthier emotion than the chilling fear which had possessed her before. Her indignation was nothing, however, to that of Lester, who had more than once endeavored to estimate what would be the penalty of throwing the King's representative out of the window.

The remaining evidence was of little importance. After Mrs. Warren and Aingier had indorsed the statements of previous witnesses, the Coroner proceeded to sum up.

"You will have judged from the evidence, gentlemen," he said, "that this is either a very simple or a very mysterious case. The most extraordinary

feature is undoubtedly Lord Arncliffe's assertion that he was being poisoned. No doubt you will give that point full consideration. If his mental condition was normal when he made that statement, then it is clear that he has been the victim of foul play; but, on the other hand, if his mind was impaired by his long illness, we should be justified in assuming that he knew he was being poisoned for the very good reason that the poison was self-administered. In this connection I should like to remind you that two of the highest authorities are unable to say what form of arsenic was used; so it is evident the poisoner was no ordinary person. Here again, one cannot but recall Lord Arncliffe's intimate knowledge of poisons. However, I do not think there is sufficient evidence to justify us in assuming the deceased to have been insane, and without that assumption we cannot entertain the idea of suicide.

"If we consider the possibility that murder has been committed, the question of motive naturally suggests itself. The members of the household seem to have been devoted to their master, as, indeed, they had every reason to be. Mrs. Warren, Simpson, Mr. Harry Warren, Miss Holt —"

Another note from Inspector Hobson found its way unostentatiously to the Coroner's desk. He

paused to read it. Then he looked up at the jury.

"There is a quite unexpected development, gentlemen," he said. "A fresh witness has just arrived from New York, and I am informed that his evidence is of the highest importance!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEPHEW FROM AMERICA

The Coroner's announcement naturally centered attention on the witness from New York. Only two people among the occupants of the crowded court knew that Edith had fainted where she sat. Those two were the detective and Lester. They watched the girl from widely different motives. Each, in his own way, was conscious of a mutual distrust. Lester's first instinct — whether the instinct of a lover or of a medical man he did not seek to discover — was to rush to her assistance. But he realized that Edith's overwrought condition was due to something more than the mere ordeal she had undergone. And the suspicion came to him with a chilling shock that people were even now prone to regard this bright and charming young woman not only as Lord Arncliffe's heiress but as his murderess.

So he sat there, watching in an agony of apprehension for the drooped head to rise again from its resting-place on Mrs. Aingier's ample shoulder. Only in the last resort would he draw the attention

of the eager crowd, already gorged with excitement, to this fresh evidence of agitation on her part. In a moment, nature asserted itself, for Edith was normally as healthy a girl as ever breathed. The blue eyes opened slowly and rested on the new witness with something of amazed inquiry. Then the color came back to the blanched cheeks with a rush, and Edith took a deep breath or two, scarcely conscious of her momentary lapse, but much awake to the astounding incidents which were taking place.

For the stranger had repeated the quaint formula of the oath administered on such occasions. He would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth — "So help me, God!"

The witness glanced with some disfavor at the Book, its soiled cover reeking of contact with the lips of many liars, which the Coroner's officer handed to him. Then he raised his hand aloft after the Scottish fashion.

"Go ahead, Judge," he said.

The Coroner darted a frowning glance at the lean-faced, alert young man who addressed him thus curtly, but seeing nothing of studied disrespect in the cool indifference which met his scrutiny, checked the impending rebuke.

"What is your name?"

"William Lincoln Bradshaw."

"I understand you are able to give certain material evidence regarding Lord Arncliffe's death?"

"I don't know anything about Lord Arncliffe's death, beyond what I have read in the newspapers," rejoined Bradshaw. "Indeed, I am on the lookout for some information in that direction myself."

"Yes, yes!" cried the Coroner, impatiently. "But the object of this inquiry is to elicit information, not to impart it. You bear the same family name as the late Lord Arncliffe. Am I to understand that you are a relative?"

"Yes, sir. Lord Arncliffe was my uncle."

Mr. Aingier sprang up promptly. Hobson had prepared him for this staggering statement, but he felt that a legal veto must be registered forthwith.

"I must be allowed to say, sir," he exclaimed with impressive slowness, "that I enjoyed Lord Arncliffe's confidence for the last twenty-five years, and during that time he told me repeatedly that he had no relatives in existence, with the exception of the most distant cousins. Indeed, he has often deplored the fact."

The New Yorker shrugged his shoulders. "I guess I am here," he pointed out.

"What are the facts, Mr. Bradshaw?" demanded the Coroner. "Have you never made yourself known to Lord Arncliffe?"

"Why, yes — and that is what is puzzling me.

I wrote Lord Arncliffe from New York nearly two months ago, introducing myself, but received no reply. I wrote again ten days ago, saying that I was coming to Europe and would call on him. It appeared to me," added the witness, dryly, "that as I neither wanted nor asked for any favor, beyond a mere acquaintance, Lord Arncliffe might be reasonably glad to meet the son of his only brother."

The Coroner bent his brows in a legal frown; the inquiry had reached bounds he had never foreseen.

"I suppose, Mr. Bradshaw," he said, "you are prepared to substantiate your claim to be Lord Arncliffe's nephew?"

"Of course, I can do that, though I don't know that it would be any particular advantage under the circumstances. I understand he held only a life-peerage, and, in any case, I have no use for a title."

"If he can't prove it, I can, sir!" broke in old Simpson. "The gentleman standing there might be his lordship's son; only that he is taller and more strongly built, he is the himmige —"

"Oh, do be quiet!" snapped the Coroner.

Inspector Hobson handed up yet another note, and, during a brief interlude, it seemed that an exaggerated importance had been attached to the evidence of this new witness.

"You were naturally surprised, Mr. Bradshaw,

at receiving no reply to your letters to Lord Arncliffe?" resumed the court.

"Not so much at the time, because I thought he might possibly be abroad, but I am much surprised now that I learn he must have received my letters. I have only recently discovered the relationship, but he wrote so affectionately up to the date of my father's death, that it seems incredible he should have utterly ignored my communications."

"That will do, for the present, Mr. Bradshaw. Call Samuel Barnes."

An asthmatic old man hobbled forward.

"You act as village postman, I believe, Barnes?"

"Yes, sir, forty years come Christmas —"

"Never mind that. Do you remember having delivered any letters at the Hall recently, letters bearing American stamps?"

"Yes, sir; there was two of 'em. One a few days ago, and one sometime back. I noticed them because we don't often have letters from Ameriky. Forty years come Christmas —"

"You can stand down, Barnes," interrupted the Coroner. "Now can any one tell me whose duty it was to receive such letters as were delivered at the Hall?"

"Mine," answered Edith at once. The shock which caused her faintness had apparently passed away, but she was very pale, and her voice had lost

its fire. "I went through all Lord Arncliffe's letters unless they were marked 'private,' but I am positive that I saw none from this gentleman — none, I mean, bearing an American postmark."

This closed the evidence, and the Coroner resumed his interrupted summing-up:

"It can hardly be said, gentlemen, that the statement of Mr. Bradshaw throws any light on the mystery of Lord Arncliffe's death, but it is important in so far as it indicates the presence of some unknown person pursuing an underhanded course. Considering all the circumstances, this new evidence points to the deliberate suppression of certain of Lord Arncliffe's letters, for, had Lord Arncliffe by any chance received them, he would surely have communicated such news to his solicitors, and probably to the young lady he had chosen as heiress of his vast wealth. In conclusion, I may say that none of these facts will be lost sight of in the police investigations which must, of course, follow, and, if I may indicate the lines of your verdict, I think you will best aid justice at this stage by finding that Lord Arncliffe died from the effects of arsenic, but how, or by whom administered, there is no evidence to show."

"That's all very well, Mr. Coroner," objected the foreman; "but it seems to me that if we find the

person who kept back those letters we shall not be very far off the murderer."

The Coroner raised his hand in deprecation of such strong language.

"Of course," he assented, "in a case of this sort, any one shown to be guilty of such an act would naturally be regarded with suspicion. But letters pass through so many hands that it is extremely difficult to fix responsibility. For instance, Miss Holt tells us she had charge of Lord Arncliffe's correspondence. Yet it is possible that before the mail reached her it might be scrutinized by a footman or some of the maids. However, as I have told you, gentlemen, none of these matters will be neglected, nor do they really concern you, and you may retire to consider your verdict, in confidence that everything possible will be done to further the ends of justice."

Juries usually do as they are told, sooner or later. Although the obstinacy of the foreman was responsible for an unconscionable waste of time, the twelve wise-heads ultimately returned a verdict on the lines suggested by the Coroner.

Lester and the stranger from America remained to dinner, at Aingier's invitation. The lawyer was naturally anxious to look into the claims of Lord Arncliffe's self-styled nephew. He could not disguise from himself that if a suppression of letters

had really taken place the young man had been hardly dealt with. Lord Arncliffe, whatever his regard for Edith, could not have failed to look upon his brother's son in the light of an heir.

Edith, too, had realized the same thing at once, and she lost no time in communicating her ideas to Aingier.

"If this gentleman is Lord Arncliffe's nephew," she said, "of course he is entitled to all the property."

"He is not entitled to sixpence," answered the solicitor, bluntly — "that is, legally speaking. At the same time, morally — and I hope I shall not be struck off the rolls for suggesting such a consideration — I think it is unquestionably your duty to make some handsome provision for the young man — always, of course, presuming that he establishes his claim."

"I shall give him everything," persisted Edith with Spartan determination, albeit a little tragically. Since inheriting forty thousand a year she had builded castles in the air. Not having the least notion what so much money meant she could have fulfilled all her delightful little schemes with a tithe of her income. At this moment the relinquishment of her innocent plans brought with it something of a wrench.

"Pooh! Nonsense, my dear! Act as generously as you like, but do not talk in that way. After all,

you have plenty and to spare, even if there are other Richmonds in the field, and I should be the last to advise you otherwise. But there is no need for you to be Quixotic. The terms of the will are so emphatically favorable toward you that I am beginning to doubt whether, in any event, Lord Arncliffe would have allowed an utterly unknown nephew to affect your position."

"Is that your honest opinion, Mr. Aingier?" asked Edith, looking at him with an open-eyed candor which caused him to laugh a trifle uneasily.

"Oh, come, you must not ask a lawyer for an honest opinion. Your duty is to carry out Lord Arncliffe's wishes as you know them. For instance, how do we know that this young American would respect Lord Arncliffe's plans regarding the various researches in which he was interested? On the contrary, he might apply the entire fortune to the creation of some gigantic 'trust,' or 'corner,' and you would find yourself indirectly responsible for dear bread, or a rise in cotton, bringing loss and starvation to those very operatives whose condition Lord Arncliffe did so much to ameliorate."

"And then again," broke in a level voice, "how do we know that this young American would be such a mean skunk as to take money from an unprotected girl?"

Aingier and Edith sprang to their feet aghast.

They turned to see Willam Lincoln Bradshaw quietly examining an old scimitar of Rajputana, exquisitely inlaid with golden line-drawings of the life of Buddha.

"I think, sir," stammered the lawyer, very red of face and striving to cover his confusion with an assumption of great indignation, "a private conversation such as this might have been respected by you. I don't know what the custom is in your country —"

"Just the same as anywhere else," said Bradshaw, in the same unemotional voice. "You left me in here ten minutes ago, and asked me to excuse you and amuse myself with some of these old curios, and I could hardly suppose you would bring the lady here for a private conversation."

Mr. Aingier almost struck his forehead in despair. In all the worry of the moment he had completely forgotten the circumstance, and now he found himself not only in the wrong, but, what was worse, looking somewhat ridiculous.

"Don't say a word," said Bradshaw, cutting short the other's rather lame apologies. "As a matter of fact, I ought to have spoken directly I understood the conversation had reference to myself. As it was, I could not resist listening to this lady's benevolent plans in my behalf, because I never had a girl take so much stock in me before.

And I should like to say right here," he added, stepping forward and addressing himself directly to Edith, "that this gentleman has taken a very proper view of the situation. I am a business man, and, if I owned a place like this, just as likely as not I should turn it into a dime museum."

He was goodly to look at, not essentially handsome, but endowed with the steady eyes and tenderly firm mouth that women like. Edith seemed to detect a lurking humor in his concluding lamentable confession. She held out her hand with a frankly friendly smile.

"We will go into business later, Mr. Bradshaw," she said. "Meanwhile, I hope you will consider Arncliffe in every way at your disposal."

"You two are providing quite a little romance," remarked the solicitor in a diplomatic attempt to learn something of the young man's credentials. "The amazing thing is that you should not have discovered your relationship until all these years had passed."

Bradshaw was far too shrewd not to see through the ruse, but he had no object in frustrating it. "It is very simple," he said. "I was not born until several months after my father's death. Naturally, my mother turned in her trouble to her own people rather than to those of her husband. As luck would have it, I happened across some letters from Lord

Arncliffe to my father — perhaps you would like to see them," he interpolated, and he handed Aingier a packet of time-yellowed papers, "and I felt I would like to know something of my father's family. As a matter of fact, Miss Holt, most everybody in the United States has had a grandfather, though I know that some people on this side will never believe it."

Aingier glanced through the letters. The handwriting was unmistakably that of Lord Arncliffe, though it had the steadiness of a man in full vigor. He noted that the letters were dated thirty years back, and his legal mind seized on the point at once.

"I see," he said, "that these letters were written from Manchester, long before Lord Arncliffe was elevated to the peerage. How did you learn that he was one and the same with your uncle Willam Bradshaw?"

"Miss Holt, promise you will never give me away!" said the American, who lost no opportunity of directing his conversation to Edith. "You must understand that in the little town where my mother lives, people don't have much to do, and some of the ladies have lately been causing considerable jealousy by discovering that their ancestors were among the teeming millions who came over in the *Mayflower*. Now, my mother would not have wor-

ried much about that, but somebody dug up her grandfather. I mean they found out that he was a Congressman, and people were always bringing it up against her. So, with a thing like that on her side of the family, she reckoned it would be better to look up my paternal ancestors a little, and I rather agreed with her, because I thought I was just as likely as not to be descended from some aristocratic pirate. Anyway, a man in Boston undertook to establish my relationship to anybody, from a duke downward, on certain terms, and as I could not afford to go any higher than just a plain peer, he discovered that I was Lord Arncliffe's nephew. By the way, Miss Holt, if you really want to give me anything, I would be powerfully gratified by that battle-ax over there. I could tell the folks at home that my ancestor, Sir Galahad de Bradawl, knocked out William the Conqueror's brains with it."

Edith appreciated the kindly badinage which endeavored to cheer her under painful circumstances. Though she was none the less resolved to make restitution, she felt that her task would be fraught with many difficulties and objections. It was the fault, perhaps, of her single-hearted honesty that she did not yet realize how slanderous tongues were already branding her as a schemer who had supplanted Lord Arncliffe's rightful heir. She had, indeed, grave misgivings that her purity of motive

was being impugned, but the episode of the three hundred pounds given to her by Lord Arncliffe was more nearly in her mind. Had she only taken the experienced and trustworthy lawyer into her confidence in that matter, she might have saved herself many heartburnings.

She had a brother, two years younger than herself, to whom the affections of her orphan heart were given without stint. She had regarded him with a selfless devotion which governed her whole life. Lord Arncliffe had helped the boy as he had helped her, and would have forwarded his career with no niggard hand had he shown himself worthy. But Lord Arncliffe, a man who had won a vast fortune by his own unaided efforts, would encourage no drones. Thus it was that the youngster, after receiving a sound education, was placed in a commercial house on probation, with the ultimate prospect of a substantial position in one of the great enterprises under Lord Arncliffe's control, directly he should win his spurs in the arena of business.

And then came the old, old tragedy — a lad spending a little more than his salary so that he might "do as the other fellows did" — a loving sister making matters worse by sending him every penny she could save out of her own earnings. And finally, a tampering with money-lenders, a juggling

with accounts, a dread of disgrace, and a despairing threat that was not, perhaps, merely a threat, of suicide.

It was only three hundred pounds, but Edith had already given him all she had, and it was at that moment, in a frenzy of anguish, she appealed to Lord Arncliffe. The old peer had, indeed, given her the money — he would have saved young Holt from the consequences of his folly, even without Edith's intervention — but he had no sympathy with one who transgressed the first rule of a business career. He was so angry that Edith, for the time being, supposed her benefactor to be hopelessly offended with her.

"You can have the three hundred pounds you ask for," he said, "but it will be the last money you can hope to receive from me. I had, of course, intended to make some provision for you after my death, but I should do you no kindness in giving you an income that would only be drained from you by your scamp of a brother."

Edith had not regretted her sacrifice. She felt that her brother, who was really a good-hearted lad, would yet show himself a worthy member of society. Whatever happened, his lapse from rectitude should remain a secret. This, then, was the cause of her agitation when she had been questioned so searchingly respecting the check for three hundred

pounds. It also explained her fainting fit when the witness from New York was announced. For it was to New York her brother had gone when Lord Arncliffe insisted that he should leave the firm whose confidence in him was weakened, and make a fresh start. And for one unreasoning moment she imagined her brother had come forward to clear her reputation at the expense of his own.

She now slipped out on to the balcony, and left the two men talking together. Her thoughts wandered again to the rosy future she had mapped out for her bright, careless brother. He was to return to college for a year or two, grow steadier under a good tutor, and then, perhaps, enter the army. And presently he would meet some nice girl, and Edith would buy them a pretty little place, and look after them until her reckless boy had learned to know the value of money so that he could be trusted with a great, great income of his own. And to-day it seemed that people were trying to drag that whole miserable business into the light — to ruin the boy's future all for one youthful folly.

"Never, if I die for it!" she exclaimed, bringing her little white teeth together with a snap. And then, womanlike, she began to sob hopelessly.

It was at this moment that Lester, who had been listening with exemplary patience to the placid

iterations of Mrs. Aingier, made a decorous escape. By some subtle instinct, he found himself on the balcony with Edith.

"May I intrude on your solitude, Miss Holt?" he asked.

Somehow, she felt safe in his presence. She gave him a tremulous smile, and strove to frame an answer, but the smile took a downward curve and she was fain to turn her head away, though she put out a nervous, detaining hand in unaffected appeal for sympathy.

Lester promptly tucked that nervous hand tightly under his arm. There was nothing of familiarity or presumption in his action. It was, in its inception, the mere protective instinct of the strong man, as free from any thought save friendship as Edith's own involuntary movement.

Presently, indeed, he began to feel a magnetic glow from the hand. He was filled with a vague desire to slay unoffending dragons. So that his arm tightened to his side somewhat — since man cannot harbor such strenuous thoughts without some tension of the muscles. And Edith would have slipped her hand away, only that her action would have seemed like a marked repulse, and that was not her intent. So the hand remained.

"I am very stupid to give way in this fashion," she faltered at last. "But it has been such a trying

day. And people appear to think such dreadful things of me —"

"My dear Miss Holt," protested Lester, "you must not notice all the vulgarities of a Coroner's inquest. It is not conducted according to ordinary legal rules, and any idiot can make himself as offensive as he pleases. I wouldn't give another thought to the matter."

"There is one thing I must think of. Of course, Dr. Lester —" Edith suddenly regained possession of her hand — "the appearance of Lord Arncliffe's nephew will make a great difference to me."

"But why?"

"Can't you see?" she cried, almost petulantly, "I dare not keep all this money when I know that Lord Arncliffe would have given it to his nephew if he had lived long enough to meet him."

"Well," admitted Lester, "I suppose the meeting might have brought about some change in the bequests; but, under the circumstances —"

"I shall hand over the estate to Mr. Bradshaw," said Edith with determination. "I want you to believe this, because I would not have you think me capable of acting dishonorably."

"You may count on my implicit belief," he exclaimed so earnestly that the girl's eyes fell in confusion. "Of course," he added hurriedly, "you are right, in a way, but, from the little I have seen of

him, Bradshaw does not impress me as a man to take anything he is not legally entitled to. In any case, it is quite evident that Lord Arncliffe would have made handsome provision for you."

"That is another matter," rejoined Edith. "But the real fortune must go to Mr. Bradshaw. I shall never accept it. I am coming to think, really, I shall be happier without such a great responsibility."

Lester, ordinarily so self-possessed, began to feel a delicious tremor of anxiety. He had regarded Edith's wealth as offering an insurmountable barrier to his suit. Although not so foolish as to prefer a dowerless maid to one who brought an income which should preserve her from want in the event of his death, he never contemplated marrying an heiress, a woman who would rank with the few really wealthy people in the land. Now, Edith's determination to relinquish Lord Arncliffe's millions opened up infinite vistas.

"Perhaps you are right," he said quietly, though his heart went pit-a-pat in the most unprofessional way. "After all, a lot of money must be a nuisance. Now, about fifteen hundred a year —"

"Yes?"

"I made fifteen hundred last year, but I shall do better next. And — and —"

He had managed to take her hand again, and with it seemed to go all the troubles which harassed

her so sorely. He was big and strong and trustworthy —

"Yes," she whispered softly.

But Edith's Purgatory was not destined to end that night on the terrace. A door opened. They heard Mr. Aingier's voice.

"Ah! there you are, Miss Edith! Come here and convert our American cousin. He says that most of this armor ought to be put on the scrap-heap. Really, he is incorrigible!"

CHAPTER IX

HARRY WARREN SUPPLIES A FRESH SENSATION

The shadows were lengthening, and the first suggestion of evening's hush were softening the vivid hues of the summer landscape, as Harry Warren strode through the Arncliffe grounds on the day following Bradshaw's arrival. There was a hint of unsteadiness in his gait. His face was deeply flushed. The haggard misery in his eye was of that enduring type which may be dulled, but cannot be drowned, by potations. He was taking his troubles like a child, blaming himself for his own folly, and almost ready to weep at the monstrous injustice of it all. He was indeed a child, in the sense that the savage is childish, an overgrown booby, absolutely deficient in self-control, and ready to gratify any passing fancy without a thought for the day of reckoning.

And now, when that most unpleasant date in the calendar of life loomed dangerously near, he was nerving himself to meet it, not with calm front and cool judgment, but with the fortitude of the brandy bottle. He walked on, slashing at leaves and twigs with his hunting-crop, and muttering inarticulate

threats against every one in general, and Edith Holt and Lester in particular.

So oblivious to his surroundings was he that he almost ran into his mother, who was making her way in the direction of the village. If Harry Warren's vices far outweighed his virtues, let it be placed to his credit, nevertheless, that there was no alloy in the gold of his affection for his mother. Her austerity awed him a little, though to him she sometimes unbent sufficiently to show the woman's heart hidden beneath the exterior of marble placidity. And, if Warren loved his mother, she devoted herself to him with the intensity of which, perhaps, only the self-contained are capable. She was under no illusions as to his intellectual capacity, nor was she blind to faults beyond glossing over as youthful follies. But, to her, he was still only a wayward child, and his very roguery seemed only roguishness. She now realized that without the assistance of a firm, unfaltering hand, he would be submerged by the flood-tide of misfortune creeping in on him. The pitifully weak link in the chain of her calculations was that she had never considered the possibility of Edith Holt, whether rich or poor, in gladness or in sorrow, hesitating to embrace eagerly the prospect of illimitable bliss opened up by marriage with this paragon.

Warren's greeting to his mother was a trifle con-

strained. He was wondering how far he bore the evidence of his efforts to quench the fire in his breast by pouring spirits into it.

But if Mrs. Warren saw she did not comment. She slipped her arm within that of her stalwart son with a gesture, half of motherly protection, and half of womanly appeal. "Now, my boy," she said quietly, "tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell you," was the sullen reply, "excepting that I have been beaten at every turn by that cursed meddler, Lester."

"Oh, I have no patience with you!" exclaimed Mrs. Warren, her words and actions nevertheless betraying an infinity of patience. "Haven't you the soul of a man in that great body of yours? Why should you fear Dr. Lester? You are younger, better-looking, and you might have secured Edith's affections a dozen times over before this interloper came from his African swamps. But of course no girl of spirit would endure your conduct — your philanderings with the Isabels and Gerties and Mays of the village. Why, I am told that a girl named May Mannering has had the impertinence to report that she is engaged to you."

"She may be," growled Harry, "but I'm hanged if I am engaged to her. Yet I might do worse. Whatever happened, I believe she would stick to me through thick and thin."

"So would your dog," retorted Mrs. Warren, coldly. "I prefer not to discuss people of that class. The most important matter at present is your financial position. You must be aware that every moment threatens you with unspeakable dangers?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Harry, with a gasp of very real anxiety.

"Oh, my son, do not try to deceive me! I may not know all, but I know enough to realize that when Mr. Aingier examines certain of Lord Arncliffe's books, it means utter ruin to you."

Warren looked at his mother aghast. Then he began to whimper with maudlin self-pity. "It was not my fault," he protested. "I dropped four hundred over the Leger, but I should have pulled it all back. And if the Grand National favorite had not gone lame! — Besides, what did a few hundreds matter to old Arncliffe?"

"A few hundreds!" murmured his mother, reproachfully.

"Well, then," he growled sullenly, "a few thousands."

"And so," continued Mrs. Warren, "you opened a private account with Lord Arncliffe's bankers to enable you to supply him with a forged pass-book."

"Yes," admitted Harry, hopelessly. He did not attempt to inquire how his mother had obtained her information.

"Well, now, do you not see that your only safety lies in destroying that forged pass-book, and the book which Lord Arncliffe kept to check his banking-account? If that is done, people may, indeed, know that something is wrong, but they are not likely to suspect you, and it will be impossible to prove anything."

"I tried to secure the books the night Aingier arrived," said Harry, "but I heard somebody moving, and did not dare to remain in the library. As it was, Aingier caught me on the stairs, and seemed very suspicious. I have not had a chance again, but I was hoping that Edith would accept my proposal, and then, of course, things would easily have come right."

"I hoped so, too," rejoined his mother, bitterly; "but I fancy that few girls would be likely to accept a proposal that reeked of brandy. Still, we must leave that matter for the present. The main thing is to secure those books at any hazard. Mr. Aingier ordered a fire to be lighted in the library before I came out, and, for all we know, he may be examining those very accounts at this moment."

"But what am I to do?" demanded Warren, looking around as though he expected instant arrest.

"Do anything," returned Mrs. Warren, stamping her foot with impatience, "so long as you do not

absolutely commit yourself. Until those books are destroyed you run a risk, not only of prosecution for forgery and embezzlement, but for something much more serious. You must not forget that Lord Arncliffe was murdered."

Warren's face paled grayly, and his hand went up to his throat. Brandy helps a man to feel certain emotions too keenly.

"That is all a beastly plot. I don't believe a word of it," he murmured.

"Yet it may be true. And people are seeking for some one who might have a motive in taking the old man's life," went on his mother, relentlessly. "Hobson, the detective, seems to suspect Edith Holt at present. But he is a dangerously shrewd man, and may look in another direction at any moment."

Warren turned haggard eyes on his mother. He was almost sober again. "I must go and get the books now," he said, as if repeating a lesson. "I must go and get them now."

"You must go now," repeated Mrs. Warren, firmly. "Hobson is the person most to be feared, and he has just driven to the village. If I meet him on my way I will detain him as long as possible. Be careful; but, for my sake as well as your own, make a bold effort. You may never have another chance."

She kissed him tenderly, and then, as if ashamed

of her emotion, walked away, her gray head erect, her step unfaltering.

Warren looked after her irresolutely. Then he experienced an overwhelming impulse to act. Something must be done. He glanced nervously at the wan shadows of the fading day, and turned back mechanically toward the Hall.

"I must get them now," he muttered, half uncomprehending.

The difficulty of the task before him was greater than he realized in his agitated, drink-dazed condition. Hitherto, Aingier had been busily engaged in preparing for the inquest and in going through Lord Arncliffe's various papers, but, as Mrs. Warren said, he might turn his attention to the estate books at any moment. Worst of all, there was the danger that he might send the forged pass-book to the bankers at Alnwick, and that, of course, would mean irretrievable calamity. Since Inspector Hobson had taken up his abode at the Hall, there seemed to be in the air a relentless vigilance that, apparently objectless, was yet all-embracing. Warren bitterly regretted the timidity which sent him rushing empty-handed from the study at the sound of the creaking stair that night of Lord Arncliffe's death. The incriminating books could then have been had for the taking; now it would be a miracle if he accomplished his purpose.

Oddly enough, this bull-headed young man had a talent for figures. Had he directed his bookkeeping abilities into legitimate channels he would have been a model accountant. The business between Lord Arncliffe and his ordinary bankers had almost invariably been conducted by the agent. Lord Arncliffe's account was so large that there was little danger of an unusually heavy item drawing attention to the irregularities. Moreover, Warren had made a point of always fetching and delivering the pass-book personally. Except when it was at the bank, the genuine pass-book never left his possession for a moment, while the forged one had always been filled in with the utmost care and attention to detail.

Now, as he neared the Hall, his dazed mind tried to formulate some definite plan of campaign. His only hope, apparently, was to inveigle the solicitor out of the room, if only for a single moment. Yet to accomplish this without laying himself open to suspicion appeared to be impossible. But he must get the books now! To-morrow might be too late.

The library was on the ground floor, and Warren saw, with a chill of apprehension, that there was a dim light within the room. He knew the light well. It came from a shaded desk-lamp. He pictured the old solicitor poring over the fatal books. At the thought, the fumes of alcohol rose again to his brain. He became almost frantic with fear.

He crept softly close to the window, and from the shadow of a clump of bushes peered in, though his eyes were blurred and his forehead clammy. Mr. Aingier, with spectacles on nose, was actually studying the ledger. At his elbow lay the pass-book. This, however, as Warren noted with the quick appreciation of nerves at full tension, was as yet unopened. How long would it remain unopened?

And then there came to him an insane desire to scream out — to do anything that might end it all, and relieve the suspense that was making an Inferno of his life — but he quieted the mocking fiend of conscience and stepped lightly up to the French windows which gave access to the library from the garden.

He turned the latch softly. Even now he had not decided on any course of action, though he had some vague hope of engaging the lawyer's attention, perhaps till dinner time, when the books might be left unguarded. So he advanced across the soft carpet, trying to frame a greeting with his dry lips.

The old man's back was toward him. Absorbed in his work, Aingier did not look up, because, as it chanced, he thought the newcomer was a servant.

Warren stood for an instant with an "Excuse me!" trembling on his lips. Suddenly a murderous impulse leaped to his eyes like a sheet of flame, and he struck savagely at the bald head with his heavy

hunting-crop. His victim sat for a moment as though nothing had happened, and Warren waited, staring stupidly. Then the old head dropped to the desk, and the wet gap where the blow had fallen lost its clean-cut edges and began to dribble red streaks across the tense skin, and so down to the pages of the open ledger. Warren almost shouted for help. It seemed impossible that he could have done this awful thing. He never meant to hurt the old man. Of course, he would not hurt him for the world! Nevertheless, the ruling instinct made him active in self-preservation. While he was protesting to himself the innocence of his intentions, he was still reaching feverishly for the books for which he had risked so much.

To take up the forged pass-book and put the genuine one in its place was the work of an instant. Then, with something of shuddering horror, he pulled the ledger from beneath the senseless head. He saw a red smear across his hands, and again the desire to scream aloud came upon him, but not so strongly that selfish terror did not master it. One glance was enough. He had the right books. His trembling fingers buttoned them under his coat, and he knew he might laugh at investigation, provided he could conceal the fact that he had entered that room just then.

His mind was clear, with the dazzling radiance of

a lightning flash amid dark clouds. He remembered that this quiet, oak-paneled apartment had, twice within a fortnight, been the scene of a crime. With the thought, blind terror gripped him again in its icy clutches. He must run away — away from the silent figure with its nerveless hands and accusing blood. He went, on tiptoe, half-way to the window, and then, with a gasp of panic born only of his conscience, rushed out as though all Scotland Yard pursued him — rushed, and catching his foot on the raised lintel of the window, fell heavily, his head striking the pedestal of a grinning figure of Pan, the goat-god.

For a few moments he lay utterly unconscious. He was not seriously hurt, though the breath had been knocked out of his body and his half-frenzied brains were rudely stilled. But the brief oblivion arose more from his overmastering fear than from any physical cause. The sense of danger supplied a prompt restorative. He struggled to his feet and began to run again, pressing his arm to his side to secure the precious books. Then he stopped and groped madly at the earth around the spot where he had fallen.

The books were gone!

And now, indeed, he was perilously near the precipice of utter insanity. The ledger and the passbook could not have been swallowed up by the

smooth lawn. He tried to force himself to believe he had left them in the library. He knew it was not so, and, had it been otherwise, he could not face that room, with its stricken tenant, a second time.

So, they must be where he had fallen. A match might help. Whatever the risk of showing a light, there was no other way. How he anathematized the overhanging trees for the dense shade they cast on the ground! He fumbled with his match-box, and then he was nearly paralyzed with fright as an iron grip on his arm restrained him and a hoarse voice whispered:

"I've got 'em, Mister Warren, an' I've got you, an' I mean to keep both! But come away from here, quick, or the game is up!"

Warren was a bully. He had a certain rude physical courage which might have sustained him in a battle. But he yielded now as he might have yielded to the specter of Death, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

A firm hand on his arm guided him unerringly across the lawn into a thicket of laurels. Utterly cowed, he accompanied his guide unresistingly. Mortal terror had so mastered him that he was ready to meet any fate, good or bad, that might befall him, and he walked with the mechanical calm of a convict on his way to the scaffold. Yet the

voice was human enough, and it sounded familiar in his ears, so presently, when reason reasserted itself, he began to see a glimmer of hope.

His captor led him along at breathless speed, but always with a caution that was in itself a warning for silence and a light step. At length they plunged into a dark spinney, and Warren, still guided by the compelling hand, crouched down in the underbrush for a moment's breathing space. In the black darkness it was impossible to distinguish face or form. From the few whispered words, it was impossible for Warren to form any clear idea as to the identity of his companion. This man had spoken in the rugged Northumbrian accents, and Warren had reached a state of mind in which he could bear anything rather than suspense, so he put a curt question to settle things, one way or another.

"Who are you?" he whispered imperatively.

The reply came in a whisper too, but these were whispers in which there was all the light and shade of any measured conversation.

"Don't you know me, Master Harry?" answered the other, banteringly. "Surely you must remember getting me six months last year over a little matter of a brace of pheasants. But there, there —" he chuckled, "a gentleman like you might easily forget a trifle of that sort."

Warren shivered.

"Bob Leigh!" he muttered despairingly. He was delivered, fettered for life, into the hands of a notorious poacher, the man who first sent Lester to whip the trout stream which flowed through Arncliffe Park.

"Yes, sir, Bob Leigh," repeated the man in the same jeering tones. "But bless you, don't think that I bear any malice. Why, I daresay, if the truth was known, gaol did me a power of good. It sharpened my hearin', for one thing; so, when I heard you and your ma talkin' awhile ago, I thought it best to follow you. Now, Mr. Warren, just you listen to me, and do as I tell yer. Go to my cottage, wash your hands, an' call at 'Jolly Jim's' for a drink. Be sure he sees you. Don't hurry. Let a servant from the Hall find you, by accident-like —"

"Yes, I'll do that," broke in Warren. "I'll pay you well, Leigh, for your help. If — if you saw — everything, you will know I didn't mean — But I must have those books!"

"You'll get nowt but what I gie thee," came the poacher's menacing whisper. "Now, be off! I'll take good care o' t' books, Mr. Warren, an', what's more, I'll see you in t' morning, when we'll have a bit crack aboot things, an' particular aboot my allowance. Not that way, you rabbit-hearted fool.

You'll meet a keeper or some one comin' to t' Hall. Make for t' Beck, and then go up to my cottage by way of the meadows. The door's on the latch. And hurry, I tell thee! Hurry, or you'll spoil everything!"

CHAPTER X

EDITH HOLT'S TRIBULATION

HARRY WARREN followed the advice of the poacher so faithfully that when he left the "Fisherman's Rest" late that night he had ceased to speculate as to whether Aingier was alive or dead. In fact, he told himself in maudlin self-confidence that he did not care much one way or the other. It was in this spirit of bravado that he lurched into Lester's room at the inn, and hiccoughed himself out again.

The old solicitor was not dead, but his condition was extremely critical. He was found by Simpson about an hour after he was struck down, still insensible, but breathing stertorously like a man with apoplexy. This new evidence of an assassin's hand caused something akin to a panic at the Hall. One mounted messenger clattered in hot haste for Dr. Smalley, and another was despatched in search of Lester by Edith, who had small faith in the pompous village doctor.

Perhaps the only two people who remained outwardly calm were Mrs. Warren and Inspector Hobson, both of whom had returned to the house

together some little time before the discovery of the crime. Mrs. Warren had no doubt as to the would-be murderer's identity. She was in an agony of anxiety to question her son and learn the exact circumstances of the crime from his lips. She dreaded lest Aingier might have recognized his assailant. Had there been a quarrel, open threats? If the solicitor regained consciousness, he might make disclosures that would bring disaster upon Harry, whose absence served to intensify her anxiety.

Had he fled, or was he skulking in the Park in the fancied security of Aingier's death? If so, it was utter madness not to make sure of his work. The most timid of animals will become a vengeful fury in maternal defense, and Mrs. Warren was no exception to the law which governs nature.

Lester arrived shortly after Dr. Smalley, but this was an instance in which the village doctor was glad to welcome his distinguished colleague, realizing that the case was somewhat beyond his own powers, and, what was more important, that rivalry was no longer to be feared. In any event, Lester would not have permitted considerations of etiquette to interfere with his determination to take charge of the patient. If much junior to Dr. Smalley in years, he was as greatly his senior in qualifications, and he let the local practitioner understand plainly that he was to act as helper and obey orders. An immediate

operation offered the only hope of saving Mr. Aingier's life, and that operation Lester performed, with only Dr. Smalley and Simpson, the valet, in the bedroom to which the elderly solicitor was carried at the first alarm.

Detective Hobson was in no way surprised that a fresh crime should follow on the heels of Lord Arncliffe's murder. The suspicion he had entertained against Edith was strengthened rather than weakened by the attack on her trustee. Of course, this was no woman's work, but the all-important question of motive was, to his thinking, as clear in the one case as in the other. He saw, however, that matters had scarcely yet reached the point where open measures were justifiable, nor was he entirely anxious to make an arrest at this stage, since a caged criminal is effectually prevented from adding to the evidence against himself, or herself — unless, indeed, he, or she, is obliging enough to confess.

But now that Aingier's authority was no longer available, the detective asserted himself more than ever. Unobtrusively, yet none the less effectively, he took over the superintendence of affairs at the Hall. One of his first acts was to exercise a strict personal censorship on everybody and everything that entered Mr. Aingier's room. It seemed that a search for the murderer of Lord Arncliffe and for the elderly lawyer's assailant would involve only a

single quest, and Hobson was resolved that no combination of beef-tea and misapplied science should interfere with the latter's chance of recovery. With the exception of Mrs. Aingier and the medical attendants, no one, in fact, was admitted to the sick-room, pending the arrival of trained nurses.

The stricken man recovered consciousness as soon as the portion of bone pressing on the brain was raised. Though he remained in a weak state, his mind was perfectly clear, and he had not the slightest idea as to how or by whom he had been attacked.

This was a sore disappointment to the detective, who, however, hinted strongly to inquirers that Mr. Aingier had given an important clue bearing on the identity of his assailant. Hobson's theory was, of course, that he would be able to judge by demeanor if any of the household were concerned in the crime. This notion was shrewd enough under certain conditions; its weak spot was that he did not allow for the possibility of a master mind being opposed to his own.

Harry Warren, or, indeed, any ordinary assassin, would probably have made tacit confession by an immediate flight in the direction of the nearest seaport. But Mrs. Warren was on guard over her son, and she paid the detective the compliment of supposing that he was not such a novice in his profession

as to take all and sundry into his confidence if he had, indeed, discovered anything.

Happily for himself, Warren arrived home in a condition that exempted him from any questioning on the night of the crime. If, next day, he was pale and a little nervous about things, it was excusable in a man who was pursuing a course of study likely to lead him to remarkable discoveries in natural history, studies which, if continued, involved acquaintance with heliotrope boa-constrictors and yellow rats bearing pink stripes.

To his mother Warren confessed that it was he who had attacked Aingier, but it was characteristic of him that he said nothing of his encounter with the poacher. Presently, when Leigh began to press too hardly upon him, he would confess that difficulty also, but he was cursed with a spirit of distrust which led him to lie until the last moment. Thus, his mother, the one person who would help him at all hazards, was likely to learn of his new danger only when it would be too late to save him.

Probably no one suffered more than Edith Holt at this period. She was not blind to the fact that popular suspicion coupled her name with the murder of Lord Arncliffe. But she had been cheered by her trustee's fatherly benevolence and the motherly kindness of his wife. Mr. Aingier, as a man learned in the law, knew perfectly well that although mali-

cious minds might prompt slander and innuendo, there was no shred of evidence to support a charge of murder against her, and, though he deplored her reticence over certain matters, he had little doubt that an income of forty thousand a year would carry her triumphantly through all minor disabilities.

Now, however, she was not merely deprived of his support and advice, but a marked change took place in Mrs. Aingier's attitude toward her. On one pretext or another, the lawyer's wife left Edith to take her meals alone. When they met, by accident, the older woman treated the younger with a pointed coldness which could not be misunderstood.

Edith was not, indeed, wholly without friends. George Lester did not abate one jot of his devoted service, nor was Lord Arncliffe's American nephew less attentive a cavalier. It is generally held that a woman with a pretty face can befool a man to the top of his bent; but it may also be urged that man, with his blunter knowledge of life — by very reason of his passion-blinded judgment, it may be — weighs character in the opposite sex by crude instinct rather than by delicate analysis. And crude instinct is often right.

Edith at first accepted Mrs. Aingier's attitude in proud silence. She could make many excuses for a sorrowing wife during a time of such suspense. She even endeavored to fall in with Mrs. Aingier's

evident wish to avoid her, leaving all explanations until such time as the invalid was no longer in danger. But when, with the passing of the crisis, Mrs. Aingier's avoidance became even more marked, and her manner almost offensive to her hostess, Edith decided that there must be some clearing of this minor mystery.

For herself, she cared nothing, but she would, at least, be treated with ordinary courtesy before her servants. Up to this time Edith had in no way asserted her position as mistress of Arncliffe. It was natural that a young girl of good breeding should leave matters in the hands of her chaperon; and Mrs. Aingier had practically come to Arncliffe to act in that capacity. Nevertheless, the existing state of affairs was intolerable. What between Mrs. Aingier's hauteur, the detective's prying eyes, Mrs. Warren's too marked civility and the agent's covert ill-will, Edith's life was a misery.

It is a melancholy fact that the majority of professional men tell their wives a great deal more of their business than is compatible with the dictates of strict prudence. Of those who do not, some preserve a silence which entails severe suffering on either their wives or themselves, while a more diplomatic few rely upon imagination, and so render all parties happy without risk. Mr. Aingier, unfortunately, belonged to the more numerous category,

and it was owing to his indiscretion in repeating to his wife Inspector Hobson's suggestions against Edith that the unpleasantness of the last few days had arisen.

Having made up her mind, Edith did not delay. She sent a servant to request the presence of Mrs. Aingier, who made her appearance looking almost as though she had borrowed some of Mrs. Warren's austerity.

"You wish to see me, Miss Holt?" she said stiffly.

"Yes," returned Edith, quietly. "Now that Mr. Aingier is practically convalescent I think the time has come for an explanation of the extraordinary attitude you have thought fit to adopt toward me since he was attacked."

"I think my husband's condition should be a sufficient answer to you," rejoined Mrs. Aingier, with as much scorn as she could throw into voice and manner.

"I am trying to make every allowance for your terrible anxiety. But we really need not fence with each other, Mrs. Aingier. I suggest that you have deliberately behaved in a most unfriendly manner toward me, and under the circumstances, I think I am entitled to know your grievance."

"I have already given you an adequate reason."

"What am I to suppose from such an answer?" cried Edith, losing all patience. "You cannot

suggest that it was I who struck your husband? Even if you think me capable of committing so wicked a crime or inflicting so terrible an injury, you must surely remember that I was actually in your company at the time of the assault upon Mr. Aingier?"

The older woman pursed her lips into something approaching a sneer. She had all the mulish obstinacy of the exemplary matron.

"It is possible to be morally guilty of a crime, without having actually committed it," she retorted. "You must not think all people are fools, Miss Holt. Young girls who have everything provided for them, even their dress accounts paid, and who never leave their homes, do not require three hundred pounds for nothing. And, in view of the suppressed letters, your fainting fit, when the arrival of Lord Arncliffe's nephew was announced, did not appear to be very creditable toward you."

"So that is what my one-time friends think of me," cried Edith, bitterly. "I am beginning now to discover that an open enemy is less to be feared."

Mrs. Aingier was an honest, motherly soul at heart. Secretly she felt somewhat ashamed of herself.

"Oh, well," she answered, the more harshly because of an uneasy consciousness that her be-

havior was not altogether generous, "after all, you have only yourself to blame. People see nothing strange in Lord Arncliffe's giving three hundred pounds to his intended heiress; but, in view of your professed ignorance of the contents of his will, they do think it strange that you should ask for such a sum. I tell you frankly there are very strong hints that you did not obtain that money from Lord Arncliffe's bankers legitimately."

"So, Mrs. Aingier, I am already suspected of forgery: I presume I shall be charged with murder next?"

"There are more unlikely things!" snapped Mrs. Aingier. The mention of murder brought to mind the attack on her husband, and with it all her bitter suspicions. "I know well enough that you did not strike the actual blow at my husband; but it simply comes to this, Miss Holt, that since you could not reasonably want three hundred pounds for yourself, you must have wanted it for somebody else. And," she concluded grimly, "I have not been a solicitor's wife for nearly forty years without being aware that the 'somebody else' is always a man where a woman is concerned."

"Well," answered Edith, with a coolness which might have warned her adversary, "let us assume that it was a man."

"Then," came the retort, in a voice shrill with

anger and rendered strident by what was deemed the invincible logic of the situation, "it was that man who nearly murdered my poor husband!"

Edith, one of the gentlest creatures breathing, could not brook the insult conveyed by that unjust taunt. She would cower and flinch like any timid maid in the minor straits of life, but in her veins flowed the bluest blood of France, and this blow from the hand of a friend was not to be endured.

Had Mrs. Ainger been gifted with greater acumen than that due to the semi-legal training she boasted of, she could not have failed to see and wonder at the calm courage which sparkled in this girl's eyes and gave unwonted firmness to her lips.

"You have told me what I wanted to know. Now you may go!"

The young marquise pointed imperiously to the door. The woman of a lower order found naught else to say. Indeed, she was fit to choke with rage, and her passion was fanned by the knowledge that she had met her mistress. She went out, quivering with passion, yet abashed.

Edith did not weep nor wring her hands impotently. She walked slowly to the window and looked out across the smiling park, all radiant in sunshine. "What is this horror that has come into my life?" she asked herself. "Who did kill Lord Arncliffe, and who was the person to gain by the

maiming of my poor old friend, that mistaken woman's husband?"

These two questions were occupying others in Arncliffe Hall, and the common belief was that to answer one would be to answer both. Was it so? That was the puzzle.

CHAPTER XI

MAY MANNERING'S LOVE IDYLL

MAY MANNERING was standing a little back from a bend in the road leading from the village to the Hall. She was evidently waiting for some one, and the petulant tapping of her foot suggested that the some one was not punctual.

The girl was weary of these secret meetings at twilight. They were well enough in the days of preliminary courtship, but now Harry Warren and she were definitely engaged, she naturally wished to exhibit him at her chariot wheels. It was true he had enjoined her to keep their engagement secret, giving more or less specious reasons for his wish. And May obeyed him, in so far that she imparted the news to her girl friends under a strict pledge of silence. It was, in fact, a secret which most of the village maids in turn had promised not to tell.

Possible objections from Lord Arncliffe had hitherto provided Warren with an excuse. But the death of the old peer in no way altered matters. Indeed, in the few hurried interviews that had taken place between them, Warren had insisted on the necessity

for concealment more strongly than ever. The girl was shrewd enough to realize that her lover, if his intentions were good, would only be too proud to proclaim her as his promised wife, but she allowed herself to be tricked — knowing she was tricked — by lame plea and shuffling evasion, after the manner of woman yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow.

She looked at her watch, first with a brief glance at the face, and then, lingeringly, at the back, the all too assertive gold case being blatant with turquoise forget-me-nots. It was a gift from Harry, and May — who belonged to a class to which charms and tokens are an essential part of true love; the breaking of a sixpence an infallible method of ensuring constancy; which regard any ring as incomplete unless there be "Mizpah" upon it — May, then, looked on those forget-me-nots as among the beautiful things of the world.

Half an hour late! Twice he had failed her in the last week, and not another minute would she wait. And so, of course, she waited on, vowing to herself, as she had vowed before, that she would endure such treatment no longer.

From the direction of the Hall there came a faint thudding of horse's hoofs. He was coming at last! The expression of mortification and anger left her face, giving place to the pout of the offended maiden who is not unwilling to be coaxed and petted into

good temper again. She went forward a little, sauntering with coquettishly downcast eyes. The hoof-beats sounded nearer, until, with a jerk, the horse was pulled up almost at her feet.

"Why, Miss May," said the voice of Wilson the groom, "I almost ran over you!"

"Is that you, Wilson? I was just taking a stroll, and I suppose my wits were wool-gathering, for I never heard you coming. By the way, you did not come to tell me the news as you promised you would."

"I came twice, miss," protested Wilson, "but you were out both times. Anyway, there isn't much news. I suppose you heard all about the inquest, and Lord Arncliffe's nephew turning up from America?"

"Oh, yes, I did hear about that."

"And of course," continued Wilson, "you heard how old Mr. Aingier was nearly murdered?"

"Yes, that is the sort of thing everybody hears. But how are affairs going generally? I suppose that stuck-up Miss Holt is putting on fine airs, now she has come into such heaps of money."

"Well, miss," answered Wilson, "people are saying some very queer things about her, and that detective chap from London watches her like a cat watching a mouse. Still, I must say the young lady is civil enough to all of us, though she doesn't seem quite so thick with Mr. Warren lately."

"Thick with Mr. Warren!" exclaimed May, shrilly. "What are you talking about?"

"Bless you, miss," said Wilson, dismounting, so that he might speak more confidentially, "any one with half an eye can see that the agent is sweet on her. It's my belief they were secretly engaged, for she used to be like honey to him, with her 'Please, Harry,' and 'Thank you, Harry.' I daresay, now she's got all this brass, she thinks she can look a bit higher. It's an easy matter to become 'my lady' or 'your grace' when you can put your hand on nigh a million."

Miss Mannering tossed her head. "Look higher, indeed!" retorted she, scornfully, trying to keep the quiver of rage from her voice. "I don't think Mr. Warren would look at her, with her pale face and mincing airs, for all her money."

"Don't you believe it, miss," said Wilson. "Any one at the Hall can tell you he has been hanging after her for a long time. I don't say it wasn't because he felt pretty sure she would get a bit of a legacy from the old man. Nobody," with a sentimental leer, "could prefer Miss Holt to you. But he's a bad egg, is Mr. Harry, and it has made my blood boil many a time to think of the way he has been deceiving you."

All May Mannering's doubts came back to her, intensified a hundred-fold as she listened to Wilson.

Warren's desire for secrecy, his continual excuses, pointed unerringly to wilful deceit. Nevertheless, she clung to the hope that he might be able to explain matters.

"I cannot allow you to speak of Mr. Warren in that way," she protested loftily. "You must know that he and I are engaged to be married, though it has not been made public."

"Yes, miss, I do know it, and very sorry I am. Why, if you were to ask Mary Brown or Betsy Spence at this moment, they'd tell you they were engaged to him too. And I should not be surprised if Polly Renwick believed the same story. I know his game — 'must keep it a secret,' says he. And so the silly lasses look down on the honest chaps who would make them good husbands, because they think the agent, with his fine clothes and his mixing with the gentry, is going to make ladies of them — d—n him!"

May began to sob, not softly, as she had always read a young lady should do when faced with proofs of her lover's perfidy, but with the primeval vigor of the country maid. She was, indeed, a little higher in the social scale of the village than the rivals Wilson had suggested, having spent a few years with an aunt in one of the big cities, and so acquired some knowledge of the piano and a few similar affectations of the higher life. But she knew in her

heart that Harry Warren was immeasurably above her in station. And, if he were capable of playing fast and loose with other girls in the village, it might well be that he was only amusing himself with her.

"Don't cry, Miss May. Don't cry on account of a brute like that!" pleaded Wilson. "If you'd only let a poor fellow like me care for you, there should never a tear come into those pretty eyes again!"

May peeped through her fingers at him in blank amazement. Marry a groom, after she had flaunted her conquest of the agent in the faces of her girl friends! She had grown to regard herself as somebody quite superior, occupying a niche in the village Pantheon only just inferior to that of the daughters of the vicar, or the doctor. Yet, in sober reality, Wilson was not so much beneath her, and had there been no Harry Warren he might have proved acceptable enough, for he was stalwart of limb, and not without good looks. May had all the innate coquetry of the village belle. She was not disposed to resent admiration so patently honest, even though the admirer might be an inferior. Therefore, there was rather timidity than rebuke in the movement with which she drew away from him.

"You, Wilson?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, miss, me; but don't call me 'Wilson.' Call me 'Bob,' won't you?"

"Well, then, Bob," murmured Miss Mannering,

with a bewildering if tearful smile. Her fury at Harry Warren's perfidy did not prevent her from being willing to do a little heart-breaking on her own account.

"Yes, me!" repeated Wilson, earnestly. "I know I am only a groom and no match for you; but I've got a bit of money laid by, and it mightn't be long before I could give you as many silks and satins as Mr. Harry Warren. Old Bill Higgs, the bookmaker at Alnwick, could tell a tale or two if he chose, and Master Harry may find himself in 'Queer Street' before long."

Wilson had drawn nearer to the girl, and now he held her right hand clasped tightly in his own. May did not resent this. She pretended to herself that she was sorry for the poor fellow, when, as a matter of fact, she felt no emotion save gratified vanity. And so she let him pour forth his impassioned story, standing with shyly averted head the while.

It was at this interesting stage of affairs that a scornful laugh caused them to fly apart guiltily.

Harry Warren, walking on the grass-grown path, had come upon them unheard; and it was he who had given that contemptuous guffaw as he passed them, without pausing in his stride.

"Sorry to have interrupted such a pretty little scene," he flung back over his shoulder.

May pushed Wilson from her with an angry ges-

ture. "Go!" she cried impatiently, "go away, or I shall never speak to you again — yes, yes, I will see you to-morrow, but go now!" And without giving him time to reply she began to run after Harry's rapidly disappearing figure.

"Harry," she cried, "oh, Harry! Do stop! Harry!"

Warren laughed again. But he did not moderate his pace. May was fully aware that according to all the canons which govern these matters she ought to sink fainting by the roadside, and recover consciousness to find Harry bending over her in a frenzy of alarm, frantically beseeching her to forgive him; but she had doubts as to the efficacy of this method in real life, and preferred, therefore, to depend on her running powers.

"Oh, Harry!" she said, catching him at last, and clasping his arm between her two hands. "How can you be so unkind?"

"Unkind?" retorted Harry, sneeringly. "I think it was kindness itself not to interrupt you. When a gentleman comes to meet a girl, and finds her whiling away the time by spooning with a groom, he naturally concludes his presence is not required."

"Spooning!" repeated May, reproachfully. "How can you say such a thing to me, Harry?"

There was a quiver in her voice that foreshadowed

tears, but Warren seemed hardly amenable to that form of persuasion.

"If you think you can fool me by turning on the water-works," he said with brutal frankness, "you are very much mistaken. I am not blind. Why, the fellow had hold of your hand!"

"I know," said May, with hurt dignity, "but it was only just the moment you came up, and the man's manner seemed so strange that I was frightened. I really do believe he had been drinking."

"Wilson is a teetotaler," said Warren, curtly. May's comment was a somewhat unfortunate allusion from his standpoint.

"Well, then, the poor fellow must be wrong in his head. Why," with a little laugh, as if at the irresistible humor of recollection, "he asked me to marry him!"

"Well," shortly, "why don't you?"

"If you are joking," she said stiffly, "I think it very bad taste. A groom! Besides, he knows very well that I am engaged to you."

"Were," he corrected.

The girl's healthy red cheeks whitened and she stopped. "Harry," she said tremulously, and now there was no art in the quiver of her voice, "what does all this mean? You insisted upon our engagement being kept a secret, and you have made the

most paltry excuses. Now you talk of our engagement being at an end. But I will not allow you to make the impertinence of that man Wilson the excuse. Why don't you tell the truth, and say you are hankering after Miss Holt?"

Warren was not entirely sorry that May herself had broached the subject. He imagined it would serve to smooth the way for him.

"Look here, May," he said, with a sudden access of sentiment not wholly assumed, "there is not a girl in all the world I think fit to wipe your shoes. And, as long as I live, I shall never love any other woman. But I am in the very deuce of a hole, and there is nothing excepting a marriage with Edith Holt that will get me out of it. Of course, dear, it need not make any real difference to us —"

May Mannering started as though a snake had bitten her.

"Thank you, Mr. Warren, for your good opinion of me," she almost screamed. "I am not the sort of person to run after other people's husbands, and when you are married to your heiress, you won't be troubled by me. But, before that time comes, there are some letters for Miss Holt to see which I think will interest her. I won't be thrown aside like an old glove for nothing."

Warren grew livid with fury. "By gad, if you do —" he began hoarsely.

"Well, and what if I do, Mr. Warren?" mocked the girl. She was on the verge of hysterics and ready to defy him utterly.

Warren saw he had made a mistake. He changed his tactics. "Forgive me," he said, dropping his voice to what he meant to sound like a tender whisper. "I'm so worried that I don't know half I am saying. But there, little girl, don't think I could ever give you up under any circumstances. If I cannot marry you, I can at least put a bullet through my head and end it all."

"Well, that would be less cowardly than marrying Miss Holt, just for the sake of her money," retorted May, softening a little, nevertheless, at the horrid picture of her lover stretched stark with a bullet in his brain. "But why need you marry Miss Holt, even if you are in difficulties? I am sure," with a languishing look, "I would be willing to share a crust with you."

Warren's ideas on diet inclined toward the stalled ox rather than the dinner of herbs, and he received this last suggestion without any marked enthusiasm. "You don't understand, dear," he said. "It is not that I have any idea of actually marrying Miss Holt. But, if it could be announced that I was engaged to her, I might secure time to find some way out of my troubles, and then it would be easy enough to break the whole thing off. You surely

don't think I would give up my little rosebud for all the Edith Holts in the world?"

The little rosebud did not seem to be entirely convinced, though she was half ready to be befooled again. "I don't care what reports you spread, provided they are really necessary to get you out of your difficulties. But mark my words, Harry, if you don't act honorably by me, you will live to repent it."

Despite repeated rebuffs, Warren even yet regarded marriage with Edith as a matter which required only a little skilful engineering for its accomplishment. The various village beauties had succumbed so easily to his fascinations, he could not realize the possibility that he should prove anything but irresistible to Edith. He was incapable of appreciating the refinement of a well-bred woman, and he attributed Edith's coldness partly to maiden timidity, but in the main to pique on account of his various flirtations; for they had been good friends in the past, and he failed to realize how utterly he had disgusted her of late. So he gave May Mannering's arm a reassuring squeeze, telling himself the while that let him once come to an understanding with the heiress, all his rustic flames, May included, might go hang.

"Oh, Harry, dear," whispered the girl, coaxingly, "why don't you give up that horrid betting? I am sure it is the cause of all your troubles."

"What do you mean?" he demanded imperatively. His tone was so harsh that May drew back in alarm. She had introduced another specter, and a more affrighting one than liquor.

"Why," she faltered, "Wilson said that Higgs the bookmaker —"

Warren turned upon her with a burst of uncontrollable fury. He could be brave with a woman, and had regained much of his wonted truculence since Aingier's recovery became assured.

"So you have been discussing me with your friend the groom, have you?" he shouted, "plotting to ruin me —" He poured forth a volley of abuse. His intent was now so clear that the girl shrank away aghast, with her hands to her ears.

"Oh, Harry!" she gasped, "oh, Harry!"

"Now listen to me, my fine lady," he went on, his voice taking a feminine note of sheer passion. "I have told you that unless I make up to Edith Holt I am ruined, and —"

The girl laid her hand over his mouth and dragged him quickly into the shadows. Not far away, on the side of the road, the red glow of a cigar shone out from the dusk, wavering with each onward movement of the smoker.

Warren stepped back still farther into the shrubbery. He gripped his companion's arm to enjoin silence, silently reviling the sudden passion which

had betrayed him into the indiscretion of raising his voice.

They waited, and the glow of the cigar grew gradually brighter and brighter, until it passed them and disappeared. Warren breathed a sigh of relief. It must have been a long way off, after all, judging by the time it took to reach them. He could not be certain as to who had passed. The figure was too slight for that of Lester, but it might have been Lord Arncliffe's American nephew — the latter, most likely, judging by the aroma the cigar left behind it. Anyway, the man was evidently too distant to distinguish the words, and, thus reassured, Warren softened his tone toward the trembling girl. Presently, with a few honeyed falsehoods, he bade her farewell.

What he foolishly believed to be more important business demanded his attention. Edith had offered a reward of five hundred pounds for the discovery of Aingier's assailant, and Leigh the poacher, as a natural sequence, had respectfully requested the loan of a few pounds. Warren knew well enough that he was being blackmailed, that he might be sacrificed at any moment. But there was always the hope of staving things off until he raised a sufficient sum to tempt Leigh's cupidity. Once in possession of the books which alone could convict him, he was safe.

Meanwhile, the American, for Warren was right in his final surmise as to the identity of the person who came unheard and so inopportunely, walked on with the calmness of one engaged in the peaceful contemplation of nature.

But Warren was mistaken in supposing Bradshaw to be too far away to overhear his conversation. When a man shouts in a rage, it naturally excites attention, and when Bradshaw heard some one exclaim that "nothing save a marriage with Edith Holt can save me from ruin," he began to take an interest in the proceedings.

He recognized Warren's voice instantly. The words were startling enough to one who was bound up in the strange events at Arncliffe. It was no part of his mission to let the agent know that he had betrayed himself. And so, when the sudden hush of the strenuous tones showed that his approach had been detected, the American promptly marked time in military fashion, making it appear that he had been far more distant than he was in reality.

"So," he mused, "that surly skunk Warren is likely to be ruined if he doesn't marry Miss Holt? Well, as I don't think he will marry Miss Holt, I will bet dollars to cents he is ruined all right."

CHAPTER XII

HOBSON BECOMES VERY ANGRY

George Lester sat at his bedroom window, smoking a peaceful pipe and idly watching the life of the village. He looked out on a scene with hundreds of duplicates in England: A patch of green whereon a few urchins, their coats set up for wickets, were playing the national game and playing it rather well; the quaint inn, given a fictitious importance by its detached sign-post and wide carriage way, relics of the old posting days; three or four tiny shops, whose owners, judged by the dressing of the latticed windows, derived their support solely from the sale of balls of string and those delectable concoctions known as bull's-eyes, of glorious memory; for the rest, a double row of cottages, with here and there women knitting and gossiping at their doors; and, a little in the distance, an old-fashioned house of worship, whose churchyard, with its time-scarred headstones, gave a soothing touch of solemn dignity to the scene.

One of the string and sweetstuff emporia stood out more prominently than the rest. It was the

post-office, and its front was resplendent with the glory of a red-painted letter-box. This shop was a little to the left of the "Fisherman's Rest" and on the opposite side. From Lester's room he obtained an oblique view of it when his glance wandered in that direction.

To a man whose recollections of swamp and jungle were yet vivid, the rustic picture was delightful. The peaceful atmosphere harmonized with his thoughts, which were of the character associated with spring-time and youthful fancy. Your true lover is generally said to suffer from extreme despondency, but Lester by no means despaired of ultimate success. Edith's manner showed that at least she regarded him as a trusted friend, despite their brief acquaintance; and Lester, indomitable of will, made up his mind to win.

His thoughts wandered back to that first meeting on the banks of the trout-stream, and in imagination he saw Edith as she had appeared on that day, her cheeks flushed with health, and in her blue eyes the brightness of innocent joy in the sunshine and flowers and all the beautiful world.

Poor girl! What a difference a few short weeks had made! The delicate bloom had fled from cheeks now wan and sunken. The tender mouth had taken a piteous downward curve. Eyes made for happiness had now an expression of entreaty,

of unconscious reproach, though they never faltered in their steadfast purity. Yet those things which were sapping her of happiness and health — the veiled sneers of so-called friends, the open insolence of mere acquaintances who cut her dead in the village — were precisely the things from which no one could protect her. If she would only give him the right, Lester told himself now, he would so fence her round with love that never a spiteful glance or envenomed shaft of slander should reach her.

He roused himself from his reverie and looked out on the village green again. Presently, his eyes turned toward the post-office. There was nobody about. The cricket-players had gone home, the knitters were vanished, for it was tea-time in the village, so, when a solitary figure approached, Lester looked at it with eyes of recognition. It was Detective-Inspector Hobson, and he had letters to send, for he made straight toward the letter-box. His movements, however, did not support this reasonable inference. He threw a quick glance round him, and then bent close to the box as though to read the printed regulations thereon. He took something from his vest pocket and fumbled at the slot with both hands, developing at the same time a remarkable interest in the string and bull's-eyes of the window.

It was all done in a moment, and then Hobson

walked over to the inn; but from Lester's position it appeared that the detective had adjusted something. Certainly he had posted no letter.

"I think," murmured Lester to himself, "that here is a situation worth watching." Drawing back a little behind a curtain, he settled himself patiently to await developments.

Nothing happened for some considerable time. The good people of Arncliffe were not much given to letter-writing, since about ninety-five per cent. of the adult population understood spades and dolly-sticks better than pens. Lester, however, had learned patience in a good school. He had interviewed African chiefs who made it a rigid point of etiquette to sit in dignified silence for at least half an hour before discussing any business, however important. He had dealt with native bearers who procrastinated with a fervor almost religious. And he had waited hours in a malarious jungle for a specimen or a photograph, rarely missing his aim in the end, whether the shot was with rifle or with camera. One thing which determined him to see the thing through was that Hobson had not quitted the inn. Evidently he, too, was awaiting developments, and Lester did not like Hobson.

Ten minutes more, and Lester saw Edith approaching. For an instant he forgot all about Hobson and the letter-box. He had a wild idea of

sauntering out and meeting her accidentally. And of course he could offer his escort back to the Hall, and — and —

Edith stopped at the post-office and dropped something into the box. Lester pulled himself together with a jerk. He had never thought of Hobson's curious trap being possibly directed against Edith. Now the situation took a new significance; and the delightful possibility of a stroll with the lady of his heart was relinquished at once. Edith, her correspondence posted, retraced her steps, stopping a moment to speak to a pretty, curly-headed mite at one of the cottage gates. Then the mother, a bloated slattern, came out, and Lester, in a white heat of fury, saw her snatch the child away.

The coarse gibe accompanying the action was inaudible, but Edith's shrinking, as though from a blow, the haughty poise of her head as she walked on, told the whole story. That a villager should dare to be rude to the woman who owned the manor of Arncliffe was an amazing thing. What deadly venom was it that some one was instilling into the public mind? And what object was served thereby?

This incident did not tend to improve matters for Hobson. Lester was already burning to avenge Edith's wrongs, and it boded ill for any one who might offer the least whipping-block.

In the management of his own business, the detective acted judiciously. He allowed another ten minutes to elapse before sauntering over to the post-office with an ostentatious letter in his hand. This he dropped into the box, and then again developed that remarkable interest in the commonplace contents of the shop window. But Lester saw his hands busy near the slot again. Ultimately Hobson sauntered off, and Lester, jamming on a hasty hat, followed, his jaw set grimly.

Inspector Hobson made his way toward the outskirts of the village, evidently in search of solitude. Slowly as he was walking, he moderated his pace at the sound of Lester's decided footsteps. The detective's quick ear noted that here was not the slouching step of a peasant in hobnails — nor even the step of a man in a hurry. It was the step of a man with a purpose, and whether that purpose was connected with himself or not, the detective saw that his best policy was an assumption of indifference.

So, when Lester was near, he looked round as a man naturally would, hearing so resolute a pursuit at his heels.

"Ah! Dr. Lester," he said, with a smile in which friendliness and respect were judiciously blended. "why have you not your fishing-tackle with you on this fine day?"

"I may yet make a cast or two," answered Lester, quietly. "At present I want to have a little chat with you."

"Lucky I thought of strolling into the village, sir," was Hobson's reply, delivered in apparent sincerity. "I hadn't much to do, and, to a man like me, stuck in London nearly all the year, it is a real pleasure to rove amongst the buttercups and daisies for a time."

"It is very gratifying that an official who is brought so much in contact with the seamy side of life should retain a taste for such things."

Lester's tone was dry, and the detective had some misgivings as to whether his companion was, to put it colloquially, "getting at him." Under the circumstances, he thought it wiser to change the subject.

"Have you learnt anything fresh, sir?" he inquired. "Things have come to a bit of a standstill, and I should be glad to break a little new ground."

"As a matter of fact," replied Lester, "that is the very reason I wanted to consult you. I have made a very important discovery, indeed."

"I am glad to hear it, sir. May I ask what the news is? It's a good thing we are alone here. We can chat without the fear of prying ears."

"I quite agree with you," said Lester. "It is an

excellent thing that we are alone. But you will, perhaps, be disappointed to hear that my discovery has nothing to do with the death of Lord Arncliffe."

"No, sir?" the query was put a little uneasily.

"No, Mr. Hobson. What I have found out is a very ingenious method of robbing his majesty's mails!"

Hobson saw instantly that his manipulation of the letter-box had not passed unnoticed. Nevertheless, he determined not to lose the fruits of his industry without a struggle.

"Indeed, sir," he said coolly, "I am afraid that won't help our case along very much. Still, the postal authorities are always very glad to hear about any new dodge of that sort."

"Oh, I do not think there will be any necessity to approach the post-office over this matter. Just hand me over Miss Holt's letter, and, as I wish that lady to be spared annoyance as far as possible, we will say no more about it."

"Miss Holt's letter?" exclaimed the other, assuming an expression of wooden surprise. "I don't —"

"Don't waste your finesse on me, my man, if you please!" said Lester, sharply. "I watched the whole business from my window, from the time you fixed up your contrivance in the mail-box until you went back and fetched it away, and with it Miss Holt's

letter — the letter you are now carrying in your breast pocket."

Hobson, finding himself cornered, tried bluster.

"Look here," he began in the pompous tone of the policeman, "you must not interfere with me in the execution of my duty! I have authority for all I do, and it is a serious matter to attempt to defeat the ends of justice."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Lester, contemptuously. "You have no authority to rob letter-boxes. You know as well as I do that it is an offense which might send you to penal servitude. However, I am not going to argue the point with you. Give me that letter, please!"

The detective tried another tack. "It's all very well, sir, for you to accuse me of taking letters from the box, but I am not to be bluffed by you or any one else. You may accuse me; your accusation will take a lot of proving."

Lester laughed — a laugh that had in it a quality which caused his companion to eye him alertly. In the course of a long experience of hard men he had never heard that kind of laugh without somebody receiving bodily injury in the near future.

"It will not take any proving," said Lester, curtly. "I am a bigger man than you, Hobson, and a younger man, and a stronger man. If you do not give me that letter this instant I shall remove it from your

coat by the use of as much force as may be necessary."

Inspector Hobson looked up and down the road with a glance of bitter annoyance. It was a white ribbon of sunlit emptiness. There was no mistaking that the young doctor meant each word he said, and though the detective was brave enough in the discharge of his duty, he saw himself at a disadvantage in every respect. Physically he was no match for Lester, and in any case, he knew very well that his tampering with the mails was indefensible. Scotland Yard is not too scrupulous in its methods of obtaining information, but the officer who is discovered in any sharp practice finds himself in the same unfortunate position as the secret-service agent who is caught with the plans of a fortification in his pocket. He is disowned with virtuous indignation by the country which employed him. The detective therefore surrendered at discretion and handed over Edith's letter with as good a grace as possible.

"There you are, sir," he said. "You must have your own way because I am in the wrong; but let me tell you, you are making a very great mistake. If the young lady is innocent, it can't do her any harm —"

"No harm," interrupted Lester, indignantly, "to have her private correspondence tampered with?"

"Bless you, sir!" was the cheerfully brazen answer, "if it is just harmless correspondence, I should not remember a word of it five minutes after I had read it. I have enough to keep in mind without bothering myself with other people's private affairs. But one thing is certain. There is a man in this case. And when we get hold of that man we shall be on the right track."

The detective noted with instant satisfaction that Lester's bronzed cheek paled a little. Here, then, was the opportunity. He had already suspected that the young doctor was in love with Miss Holt, and a magic touch of jealousy might transform the implacable enemy into a useful ally. Hobson was an astute judge of erring human nature, but he fell into the error of deeming all men base.

"Likely enough," he went on, assuming a tone of parental benevolence, "the young lady has fallen into the hands of some scamp. It will be doing her a kindness to find out who he is and put a stop to his game. To tell you the truth, sir, I have a particular reason for believing that letter to be important. Now, if we just have a peep at it —"

"If you suggest such a thing to me again, I fear I shall be tempted to try and break your neck. Remember, I shall not tolerate any more pilfering of letters. Miss Holt has nothing to fear from you,

Hobson, and her personal correspondence must certainly be sacred."

Lester walked away abruptly. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he turned back. "Here," he said, with something of apology in his voice. "Take this," and, dropping a sovereign into the detective's unsuspecting palm, he nodded and went off again at a brisk pace.

Indeed, he was already somewhat ashamed of himself. In his fiery zeal for Edith he had behaved rather like the hero of a melodrama, and he had all the true Englishman's horror of betraying emotion of any sort. Then again, this busybody of a policeman was acting only according to his lights, and those lights meant what the average man calls a disagreeable prying into other people's business.

Inspector Hobson's income, what with matters of private generosity and *et ceteras* — many *et ceteras* — approximated to five hundred pounds a year, and Lester's sovereign was the most unkind cut of all. He looked at it, and flung it to the ground, stamping upon it in a sudden access of fury.

"The cursed impudence of it!" he muttered.

The sovereign twinkled up at him from the gravel.

"I'll get level with him before I 've finished," he growled, but the sovereign sparkled so that he picked it up and put it in his waistcoat pocket. And then he chuckled in his wrath.

"There were two letters," he said. "Let me see whether I have managed to keep the best one. You're clever, Dr. Lester, but you've made a mistake this time."

Edith had, in fact, posted two letters, and Hobson had given Lester only the first which came to hand. Now he sat on a grassy bank to investigate.

"'Sidney Holt,'" he read on the envelope — "I don't like that — and 'U.S.A.' — I don't like that either."

He produced a little implement like a pair of miniature curling-tongs, and inserting it in the corner of the envelope, gripped the edge of the letter and began to twist. This is an invention for which the world is indebted to the Russian censor. In two minutes Hobson had the letter out and in front of his eager eyes. He read:

My dear Reggie. — Come home at once. I am in dreadful trouble. You can put things right for me. Lord Arncliffe's letter will explain that he gave the three hundred pounds to start you in America. Tell nothing to any one until you have seen me.

The eager critic read the letter through many times, but could find only transparent honesty in every line.

"Sometimes," he murmured, carefully returning it to the envelope, "I am almost afraid that the young lady is innocent!"

CHAPTER XIII

EDITH RESOLVES TO FIGHT ALONE

LESTER hastened onward, confident of catching Edith ere she reached the Hall. At the post-office he delayed to register her letter. With a man of Hobson's perverted ingenuity in the locality, this seemed to be the only safe course. The detective's suggestion that Edith was in correspondence with some unknown man caused Lester scrupulously to avoid reading the address. But he had been bound to glance at it in order to identify Edith's writing when Hobson handed it to him, and that fleeting glance had shown him that the letter was addressed to a "Miss" somebody or other. He was not altogether sorry.

This business concluded, he pushed forward at a swinging pace. Short cuts to the Hall were familiar enough to him now, and there was little chance that he would miss Miss Edith. As it was, he came upon her sooner than he expected, for she had sat down on a rustic railing that protected a young tree. Musing over the tangled growth of mystery which surrounded her, she forgot time itself for a while.

And so he found he, her hands clasping her knees,

and a whole tragedy of dejection in the melancholy droop of her head. She looked up at the sound of his footsteps, and greeted him with a smile of infinite sweetness.

"I am grown indolent, you see," said she, with a brave attempt at cheerfulness.

"I am glad of it," was the reply. "Had you continued your walk to the Hall I might have failed to overtake you."

"Then you knew I was in the Park?"

"Yes, indeed. I saw you from my room at the Inn when you posted your letter."

"But that is ages ago!" exclaimed Edith, unconsciously reproachful.

"I know it is," said Lester, "but I was engaged in some investigations at the time, and the result is that I strongly advise you to register all your letters of any importance until matters have passed out of their present ridiculous impasse."

Edith looked at him in astonishment. "Register all my letters? But why?"

"I suppose I must tell you the whole story," said Lester. "I saw that detective, Hobson, fastening some contrivance in the letter-box — a kind of wire cage which fitted into the slot and was practically invisible. Directly you were out of sight he pretended to post a letter of his own and took the opportunity of securing yours."

Edith crimsoned with resentment. She sprang to her feet. That her correspondence should be at the mercy of such a man outraged every womanly instinct. Now Lester saw a new phase of her character. She was royally enraged; and the slenderness of the erect figure, and the tininess of the clenched hands, detracted nothing from the dignity of her anger.

"But this is infamous!" she exclaimed passionately, "infamous!"

"Infamous, indeed! but pray do not be in the least concerned about it. Of course, I compelled him to hand me the letter at once, and I have taken the liberty of registering it in case he might tamper with the letter-box again."

"But did you get only one of my letters, Dr. Lester?" asked Edith, with a puzzled air, "I posted two, and —"

Lester flushed darkly with mortification and anger. "Good Heavens!" he cried, "idiot that I am! Wait, Miss Holt, and I will go back." He turned toward the village, intent to reach Hobson, literally at breakneck speed.

"Stop!" cried Edith. "Oh, Dr. Lester, please do stop!"

So Lester perforce returned to her, though reluctantly, and looking disconcerted.

"You cannot possibly do any good now," she

said. "When he found himself detected, you may be sure he would lose no time in making himself acquainted with the contents of the other letter. But tell me, to whom was the one he gave you addressed?"

"I did not look," was his reply, "but it will be on the registration receipt."

He handed her the slip of paper. Edith, reading the name, breathed a sigh of relief. The letter was to an old and trusted school friend whom she was inviting to come and stay with her.

Not for worlds would she have had its contents betrayed. It contained no confession of crime, no clue to the mysteries agitating Arncliffe, but in it George Lester was mentioned, and she had described him as a darling!

In her relief at this escape she was almost ready to forgive Hobson. "The other letter doesn't matter a bit," she assured Lester. "It is only to my brother in New York, and really there is nothing in it of real importance. I may tell you now, Dr. Lester, as this detective must know it, that the three hundred pounds which my kind friends seem to imagine I stole from Lord Arncliffe was given to me to — to start my brother in life."

Edith was a poor hand at concealment. Had Hobson been there to hear that little falter in her voice he would have scented a fresh intrigue, but

Lester was ready to accept whatever she might say without question.

"I did not wish to speak of the matter," she went on, "since, after all, it is purely my own business; but it has led to so much malicious talk and has caused even my letters to be overhauled, that I think it best to explain. My brother has in his possession a kind message from Lord Arncliffe, in which the subject is referred to, and I have therefore asked him to come home and help me to face things. I think it will all be a little easier to bear if I have somebody to stand by me."

"I did not know you had a brother," said Lester, "Is he older than yourself?" He asked the question a little anxiously: an elder brother might have ambitions for his sister which would clash decidedly with Lester's aspirations.

"Oh, no, he is a mere boy; but he is all I have in the world. And he is at least man enough to protect me from insolence such as that of Hobson's to-day."

"Miss Holt, I beg you to believe that you are not without friends who would —"

"I know," she interrupted, "and that reminds me that I have not yet thanked you for your prompt interference on my behalf."

"Please do not make me recall how egregiously I blundered," he protested. "I am still wondering

whether you will ever forgive me for leaving one of your letters in his hands."

"Why, so far as that is concerned, I think you have really done me a service. At least it will show him that I obtained the three hundred pounds from Lord Arncliffe honestly. That," she added bitterly, "will reduce the number of crimes charged against me. Those remaining are the poisoning of Lord Arncliffe, the suppression of Mr. Bradshaw's letters in order to cheat him out of his inheritance, and the bribing of somebody to attack Mr. Aingier. Really, Dr. Lester, I wonder you care to take the hand of so dreadful a person."

"I will take your hand for good and all if you will give it to me?" rejoined Lester, stoutly. He was amazed and a little alarmed at his own boldness in the next instant, but win or lose, the die was cast now.

Edith drew away hastily.

"Oh!" she gasped, indignant at the monstrous unfairness of turning her own perfectly innocent remark into a weapon of attack against her. It looked as though she had invited his proposal, and so she endeavored to crush him with icy aloofness and a severe gaze before he could make any further advance. Only she could feel herself blushing hotly, and when that severe gaze of hers was met by his steadfast glance, her eyes had to drop and turn

away. She strove to frame some flippant reply, and thus twist the incident into badinage, but a stolen glance at Lester's face had so demoralizing an effect that she only said "Oh!" again.

Lester had taken the plunge, and he meant to go on.

"I am not going to say anything about the disparity of our positions," he said, "because, if you think me the sort of man to be influenced by your wealth, it would be utterly hopeless for me to address you at all. But you know that it is only yourself I want. I love you, and — and —"

The timidity of the uncertain lover asserted itself, and he began to hesitate — and, hesitating, might have been lost, because, as his confidence waned, Edith gathered courage proportionately.

"I love you," he repeated with a curious iteration for a man wont to be so glib of speech.

Fortunately, it was a statement which Edith found interesting. For a moment she experienced an almost overmastering desire to fling herself into the sanctuary of his arms. He looked goodly and big and strong. Let him but stand at her side, and no one would dare attack her. And he loved her!

She put out a tremulous hand and touched him, as though to see if he were real. She lifted her brimming eyes to meet his ardent gaze. For an intoxicating instant she knew that she clung to him while he pressed hot kisses on her lips.

"Oh, no!" she cried piteously. "Oh, no! Not that! You must not!"

"But it is irrevocable, my darling," he whispered exultantly. "Oh, my little love, I have kissed you, and you are not angry! Say you are not angry!"

Edith put out her hands and held him from her. Let his arms close upon her once again, and she would have no courage to send him away. She sped off toward the Hall, Lester walking by her side and making earnest appeals to her to place all her trust in him. At last she recovered her self-possession. And she knew now that she too loved, but loved, as all good women love, with an utter lack of selfishness.

"I am not angry, Dr. Lester," she said, her voice faltering, but her face alight with a noble courage. "I believe — nay, I know — you are a good and honorable man, and as long as I live I shall be proud of the love you offer me. But I am proud, too, in another sense. If ever I become a wife I will go to my husband without a blot upon my name. It is not enough that I should know myself to be unsullied — I will be 'above suspicion' in the eyes of the world as well."

"But, my dearest, do you think I care —"

"No, it is I who care," interrupted Edith, gently. "Can you think me so reckless as to suppose I would put an end to your splendid career — expose

you to the gibes of petty rivals as the man who married Edith Holt the murderess? You would end by hating me!"

"My career!" he retorted bitterly. "What is my career worth in comparison with you? You take an altogether morbid view of the matter. These things are forgotten in six months; and in any case the whole mystery will probably be cleared up before long."

"When it is, come to me and say again what you have said to-day — if you have not changed your mind."

"And then?" he whispered eagerly.

"I will tell you what I think about it," said Edith, with a tantalizing smile. They were almost at the Hall now, and by sheer force of the joy in her heart, she gave rein to her innate coquetry.

"Good-by!" she cried, holding out her hand.

Lester looked dangerous, but she frowned and stamped her little foot, and he, losing courage, dared only to press his lips to her glove. He turned away dejectedly, and Edith looked after him with something of surprise. Had she driven him away from her, this knight errant who had found her in the wilderness? Then she ran back toward him, her cheeks aglow.

"Shut your eyes," she commanded imperiously, "and don't dare to move!"

Lester obeyed, in sheer astonishment. He felt a delicious touch, light as thistledown, on his lips, and awoke to find himself alone, alone in a smiling world which had suddenly changed into a Paradise.

CHAPTER XIV

BRADSHAW TAKES HOBSON IN HAND

William L. Bradshaw had made a friend of the detective. He had, indeed, made a friend of every person with whom he came in contact, being gifted with a calmly persuasive manner which inspired confidence in all men, not to mention women. A reckless prodigality in the matter of half-crowns, too, caused the villagers to imagine that the millennium was imminent, if not already in their midst. So far as Hobson was concerned, he took special pains to establish good relations, because he saw that the detective was endowed with infinite capabilities, though wrapped in the red-tape of Scotland Yard.

The American was deeply interested in the mystery of Lord Arncliffe's death. The sentimental aspect appealed little to him, since he had never set eyes on his relative. But it was clear that influences had been at work which had caused great injury to his own personal prospects. Lord Arncliffe would certainly have taken the claims of so near a relative into consideration in disposing of his wealth, had not

the fact of the existence of a nephew been kept from him.

It was impossible to avoid the doubt that Edith might have been responsible, at least for the suppression of Bradshaw's letters. Yet, from the first, the hard-headed American had resolutely refused to regard her as guilty in the smallest degree. There was a mystery, and that mystery he intended to solve. In all his friendly visits to the Hall he had kept his eyes open for the slightest clue tending to throw light upon the subject. The first thing essential was to win the trust of the detective, and now he had so far succeeded that the inspector was installed in his private sitting-room at the "Fisherman's Rest," ready to discuss developments and to impart his latest theories.

The quaint old room, with its carved wainscoting and its time-ensabled beams, exercised a restful influence over the nervous American. After he had pushed a tray laden with whisky and cigars — cigars which were real Havanas and not doped imitations — across the table to the detective, he sat for a long time silently meditative, with something of that red-Indian imperturbability which seems to be the natural inheritance of men born in the great new land.

Hobson was quiet too. He was not a waster of words, nor was it part of his policy to hurry any

man's thoughts. At length Bradshaw took his cigar from between his lips.

"Partner," he said, "you are weeping over the wrong grave."

The other looked at him with an expression of blank inquiry.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bradshaw, testily, "can't you understand plain language? You are barking up the wrong tree."

"But what the dickens do you mean?" asked Hobson, still only half comprehending.

"Well, now, you are wasting your time trying to fasten things on to that poor little girl, Edith Holt, when you know she is the last person in the world to have committed so cold-blooded a crime. There is the business of that check for three hundred pounds she says the old man gave her —"

"I withdraw that," interrupted Hobson, hastily. "I have every reason now to believe that Lord Arncliffe did give her the money. But there is something inexplicable in connection with those letters of yours. It is all very well for the young lady to say she never had the least idea of inheriting Lord Arncliffe's money; but let us suppose, for the sake of our inquiry, that she did know the terms of his will. She, or some one acting in her behalf, might very well decide to put him away before your arrival on the scene caused him to change his mind. Prob-

ably he would have treated her handsomely in any case; yet I do not think there can be much doubt you would have been the heir instead of Miss Holt."

"Neither do I," agreed Bradshaw, "but that does not prove Miss Holt to be a fraud. There is something in that girl's face —"

"I know," smirked Hobson, with an insufferable wink. "She is a perfect little angel to look at, and her soul is mirrored in her eyes. Bless you! I know ladies who are doing their 'ten years penal' at this moment who could give Miss Holt points —"

"Sometimes you talk like a perfect idiot," broke in Bradshaw, speaking with icy deliberation. "You British policemen are not taught anything, except the regulation of traffic. You do that well enough, I'll admit, but when it comes to a delicate case like this you are not in the same catalogue as the French detectives, or, as far as that goes, the American. Why, man alive, a New York headquarters sleuth would have discovered the murderer a week ago; and, unless he coughed up handsomely, would have delivered him to the inexorable clutches of the law, there to be held until the jury disagreed on the twenty-first appeal, and most all the interested parties were dead."

"That is all very pretty, Mr. Bradshaw," was the self-sufficient reply; "but if you come down to real results, I think you will find that English detectives

score more successes in the long run than all your Frenchmen or Americans put together. If we find a woman with her head cut off, we don't look up the antecedents of the two-year old baby, simply because he is the most unlikely person to have committed the crime. As a rule, the most likely person is *the* person, and anyway, I am not such a 'perfect idiot' as to allow myself to be thrown off the scent by the simpering of a pretty face."

"Say," exclaimed the American in accents of deepest disgust, "you give me a pain in the neck. I have met poisonously bad women with pretty faces, but they have not taken in any man worth a cent. You want to read up Lombroso, my friend — you should study criminology in its physiological and physiognomical aspects. Show me that Miss Holt's head is too flat and her eyes too close together, that her ears are pointed, that the angle of her jaw is too wide or too narrow — show me even that her mouth is too large or too small — confound you! — and I will say: 'Let us by all means watch Miss Edith Holt.'"

"I must admit that she is an uncommonly fine girl," growled Hobson. "And I don't mind the further admission to you, sir, that I am not quite so sure as I was even about her complicity in the affair. As I told you, I am quite satisfied regarding the three hundred pounds. And I am pretty well cer-

tain, too, that she had nothing to do with the attack on Aingier. At the same time, there is something very queer about it all, and more than once I have been near arresting her upon my own responsibility."

"And a pretty pickle you would be in when she was proved innocent."

"I know that," and the detective's instant candor revealed his deadly earnestness. "That is what held me back. It would have been a grand feather in my cap to convict a woman with forty thousand a year, but if I had failed there would have been an end to the career of yours truly. Still, you see I must make some move. It does not redound to my credit that the murder of a man like Lord Arncliffe should remain a mystery, and if I don't clear it up the authorities will supersede me for a certainty."

"There was not any money stolen when Aingier was attacked?" asked the American, irrelevantly.

"Not a halfpenny, so far as we can make out. The only thing missing was an account book, on which he was working. And — there you are again — Miss Holt knew all about Lord Arncliffe's accounts. If there was anything wrong, it is only reasonable to suppose her to be the person most interested in suppressing the tell-tale figures."

"Well," continued Bradshaw, still apparently

without reference to the subject under discussion, "I have been spending quite a lot of my time lately in the bar down-stairs. I do not mean the parlor, but right among all the horny-handed sons of toil who come here to measure their wages against Jones's beer. They are quite an interesting lot of men and remarkably fond of strong drink."

"So they are, but I don't think you will pick up much information from those yokels."

"Perhaps not. Anyway, a chap they call Leigh, a sort of poacher and never-work, seems to have struck it pretty rich lately. The old landlord tells me that this fellow used not to have two cents to rub together, and was always cadging from some one or other. Now he has taken to setting up drinks for the crowd and changing gold right and left."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hobson, with a nod of comprehension. Here was a situation which came within his province. "We will just keep an eye on this gentleman who has become rich so suddenly. I can see, sir, you have got the makings of a first-class detective in you. Of course, it would be easy enough for the young lady to bribe a fellow like that to do any sort of crooked work."

"Why in thunder can't you leave the young lady out of your calculations?" cried Bradshaw with renewed impatience. "If she is guilty, you can always lay your hands on her when the proper time

comes. Judging by the way you are going on, you will end by letting the real murderer slip through your fingers."

"I suppose I shall have to telegraph to the Yard for another man," said Hobson, ruefully. "I hate to do it. You get a case like this all cut and dried, with only one little thing lacking to make the chain of evidence complete. And then a new man comes along, hits on the clue by accident, and takes all the credit while you have done all the work."

"Still, you have the local policeman to help, haven't you?"

"Don't talk to me about the local policeman!" exclaimed the Scotland Yard official, in tones of intense disgust. "Fox is his name; it ought to have been Goose. The night Aingier was attacked I found some splendid footprints on the soft ground outside the study window, and I set Fox to keep guard over them until I could take a proper cast. It appears that Fox had heard of taking a cast too — read it in 'Sherlock Holmes' or somewhere — and when I returned I found he had saved me the trouble. He sent for some plaster of Paris, he did, and poured it, thin as pea-soup, all over the ground. Of course, when you are dealing with soft dry ground you must oil it very carefully before doing anything else — and the result was that the impressions Mr. Fox got might have been made by anything from

Man Friday to an elephant. No, sir; the less we have to do with P. C. Fox the better."

"See here," said Bradshaw, "I have nothing particular to occupy me just at present, and I fancy I would like to take a hand in the game myself. Supposing *I* were to take care of this 'got-rich-quick' gentleman?"

"Well, sir," said Hobson, doubtfully, "it is rather against the rules of the force to have anything to do with amatoors, but as a special favor to you —"

"Oh, come off the fence, and don't talk that kind of nonsense to me!" interrupted Bradshaw. "So far as I can gage the situation you want to secure all the credit for this business and any dollars attached to it — and you don't care tuppence who gets hanged in the process. Anyway, the thing interests me, and I am going to see it through. And, believe me, Hobson, I am not worrying any whether it is according to the rules of the force or not. Have another drink?"

The whisky was good, and the quietly expressed determination of Bradshaw unanswerable, so Hobson helped himself discreetly and awaited the developments which he fancied lay behind this offer of help.

It appeared strange that a detective of his standing at Scotland Yard — for he was unquestionably regarded as the star man of the Criminal Investiga-

tion Department — should discuss things so freely with a comparative stranger. But the American had quietly intimated to him that he was prepared to hand over a handsome reward — without any undesirable publicity and entirely apart from Lord Arncliffe's strange bequest — should Hobson succeed in securing the conviction of Lord Arncliffe's murderer. The police regulations abound with vexatious restrictions in the matter of fees, or personal remuneration, and five hundred pounds passing as a mere private matter between gentlemen was a sum of money not to be thrust aside with lofty indifference.

Bradshaw did not give any further opening, so Hobson resumed the conversation.

"There is another point," he said, "which requires a good deal of explanation. This Dr. Lester, who headed the scientific expedition sent to West Africa by Lord Arncliffe, arrives here on a fishing excursion. By some extraordinary lack of knowledge he was not aware that his patron lived in the neighborhood. We may note, in passing, that Dr. Lester is a very eminent authority on poisons. Now, on the very day of Lord Arncliffe's death, Dr. Lester and Miss Holt are admittedly found together by young Warren. They pretend to be strangers, and tell some cock-and-bull story about an otter and a trout."

"Did you say you were Irish?" asked Bradshaw suddenly, with a disconcerting smile.

"Well, sir, you know what I mean. Who is to say that Miss Holt and the doctor were really strangers — that they were not, as a matter of fact, old lovers? I have had my eyes pretty wide open, as you may imagine, and if those two are not sweet on each other, I will eat my hat."

"That may or may not be true," said the American, shortly. Somehow, the suggestion of an understanding between Edith and George Lester was not particularly pleasing to him. "Anyway, Dr. Lester is a sure-enough white man, and everybody knows that he has only just returned from the Ashantee swamps. If that is the best you can do, go and place your head under the pump in the yard, my good Hobson."

"All very well," returned the detective, somewhat ruffled at last by the repeated aspersions on his intellectual capacity. "It is not impossible, nevertheless, that the meeting by the trout stream was not the first one. If it was, they have gone ahead with remarkable rapidity. Young Warren says —"

"Did it ever strike you to devote a little more attention to Mr. Harry Warren?" interrupted Bradshaw. "There is something very queer about that interesting person."

"Oh, nonsense, sir!" cried Hobson. "He is the

sort of man you will find by the hundred in the rural districts of England — not overburdened with brains, and with a little of the atmosphere of the stable about him. But he is not of the type which makes a cunning murderer."

"I know all about the type," Bradshaw assured him. "I have read about them. They always break their necks riding to hounds. But what I have particularly noticed is that Mr. Warren has taken up a special branch of toxicology. I will bet you any reasonable sum that he is in the parlor down-stairs right now, experimenting on himself with brandy high-balls — 'B-and-S,' I think you call them. Now, I don't know how long Mr. Warren has been making himself a martyr to science, but I am willing to swear he has not been going his present gait for much more than a week or two, because there is no man living who could stand it."

"I am afraid it is not a habit of which he has the monopoly," was Hobson's reply.

"Hobson, I do believe that a week's steady talk with you would do me a world of good. It would clear my ideas. What I am trying to say is that there is something strange in the coincidence of Warren's sudden outbreak of intemperance following so closely on the beginning of all those troubles at the Hall. I have made considerable inquiries in a quiet way, and I hear that although he was not,

perhaps, exactly a temperate man, yet there was nothing marked in his dissipation until the last few weeks. I do not know how it strikes you, but it appears to me to be a toss-up between an uneasy conscience and a coward's attempt to gain courage. Keep an eye on Warren! It may be helpful."

CHAPTER XV

BRADSHAW HAS AN ADVENTURE

THERE was a knock at the door, and Lester entered. He and Bradshaw had been thrown together a good deal. Staying, as they did, at the same inn, they met frequently, and each man recognized qualities in the other which tended to establish confidence and friendship.

"Poison yourself," was the American's welcome, as he pushed the whisky-decanter toward his new visitor.

Hobson, unaware that Lester was acquainted with his theft of Edith's second letter, looked up at the young doctor with the ingratiating smile of one who would have bygones be bygones. He was quickly undeceived.

"Well," said Lester, addressing him with scant courtesy, "may I ask if you have posted that other letter of Miss Holt's, or have you appropriated to your own use the draft contained in it?"

For once, Hobson's inscrutable countenance betrayed emotion. He went deathly pale, and the excuse that was trembling on his lips gave place to

the truthfulness of honest indignation. "I don't think I have deserved that," he said with something of natural dignity. "Miss Holt's letter, with the money it held, has been posted safely enough, and I am bound to say, in justice to the young lady, that what she wrote clears her at least from one suspicion. Now, sir, technically, I have committed a crime which might have grave consequences for me. Though you really have no evidence against me, I am not going to attempt any concealment. I have only taken reasonable measures to unravel a mysterious murder, and I am willing to put it to Mr. Bradshaw, here, whether in the interests of justice I did not act rightly."

"Why, say," remarked Bradshaw, "I don't know a thing about the matter yet. You say you have committed a crime. I am open to believe that about anybody. Don't be discouraged, Hobson. At your age, it can't be the first crime you have committed. And I am dead sure it won't be the last."

The answer came from Lester, who found the American's lazy cynicism a little jarring. "Inspector Hobson's crime is simply this," he said curtly: "he has been tampering with the post-office in order to get hold of Miss Holt's private correspondence."

"I don't think we ought to blame him for that," said Bradshaw, dispassionately. "A man does not

become a detective, anyway, unless he has the instincts of a horse thief. Sit down, Hobson," he went on, as the official, really hurt, half rose. "I don't mean that as personal — in fact, I am trying to justify you. See here, Dr. Lester, if you face things fairly and squarely, you must realize that no detective work is possible without what you and I would call underhanded methods. After all, nothing of the sort will injure an innocent person in the long run; and your British police have the reputation of being reasonably honest, though," he admitted, when Hobson's countenance cleared a little, "I am not much of a believer in miracles myself. Look cheerful, Hobson, and have another drink. Dr. Lester is going to forgive you."

William Lincoln Bradshaw suggested the consumption of alcohol with appalling frequency, but as his own habit was to take rather less than a teaspoonful on each occasion, he, at least, suffered no ill effects from his pressing hospitality.

"I want no forgiveness from anybody," said the detective, sulkily. "I am only doing my duty. Miss Holt may be as innocent as you or I, but you can't dispute that Lord Arncliffe was murdered, Mr. Aingier nearly murdered, and possibly other crimes committed which these more serious ones were meant to cloak. I don't profess to be a Sherlock Holmes. My system is to give my attention to

the person who benefits most from a crime. And I have never drawn blank yet."

"Well, now," said Bradshaw to Lester, "I was just telling this unerring sleuth-hound of some peculiarities which had struck me in the conduct of that blatant Britisher, Warren. Don't wink the nap off your eyelids at me, friend Hobson. Just at present I propose to make my calculations on the basis that Dr. Lester is a square man, and if you don't like it you can do the other thing, for the proposition is my own. Now, Lester, I have also been telling our friend here about that poacher fellow whose extraordinary access of wealth we have both noticed. And I have further drawn his attention to the fact that Harry Warren is drinking a great deal more than any one takes out of mere devotion to liquor. He gives one the impression of a man so harassed that he is endeavoring all the time to escape from his own vicinity. I am inclined to attribute all this to the workings of a troublesome imp called conscience, which we read about in fairy tales. I have also made some considerable study of Arncliffe Hall lately, and I notice there is a light in one of the rooms half through the night — conscience again. People who live in a Sleepy Hollow like this go to bed early, in the hope of dreaming they are alive. If we could take a peep into that room we might see something to enlighten us."

"What room is it?" asked Hobson.

"The room just over the library, where old Aingier got soaked on the cabeza."

Bradshaw had spent his early days amid that delightful society which infests the valley of the Rio Grande. When talking of deeds of violence, he had a habit of introducing, here and there, a word of Spanish, which is, after all, the natural language of assassination.

"Oh, but it is no good bothering about that," protested the detective. "That is simply the private sitting-room of Mrs. Warren, the housekeeper."

"So I supposed. But what special cares has Mrs. Warren to keep her up so late? I first noticed this burning of the midnight oil on the night of the attack on Aingier. As you know, Dr. Lester, I waited until you decided that your patient was out of immediate danger; and then we came back here together, nearly at daylight. It was reasonable enough that Mrs. Warren should remain awake on that occasion, and I should have thought nothing further of the matter, had not the same thing been repeated night after night. I watched round about the Hall — partly because this business has interested me, and partly because I have been doing a little detective business on my own account. I surmise this much — that Mrs. Warren waits up to talk with this hopeful son of hers. And I am

inclined to think that a little knowledge of the situation on our part would produce quite a lot of information."

"I don't like spying," objected Lester, a note of decision in his voice.

"Neither do I," retorted Bradshaw, "but I should like still less for that winsome young girl to be charged with murder, as Hobson proposes. Anyway, it is not your funeral. I am only telling you a plan of my own."

"If there is anything I can do to help Miss Holt," began Lester, eagerly.

"Ah, you see that side of it, do you? If you really want to do violence to your high-toned feelings, you might just go and mix some liquor with the wealthy gentleman they call Leigh, and shadow him home, too. I wouldn't be at all surprised if that skunk Warren dropped into the game before you are through."

Bradshaw looked at his watch. "Half-past ten," he continued. "You have half an hour in which to cultivate Mr. Robert Leigh. Now go away, boy, and leave Hobson and myself to elaborate our low-down plans."

Lester, half offended, yet conscious that Bradshaw was in the right, went down-stairs. But there was no sign of the poacher. He returned, offered to help the others, but was sent to bed.

Bradshaw and the detective, taciturn men by nature but rendered talkative by the necessity to hide their thoughts, remained silent for a long time, considering the position. There was really little to go upon. A light in a window at an unusual hour might have a dozen adequate explanations. The mere events which had happened at the Hall were enough to account for the sleeplessness of an elderly woman to whom Arncliffe Hall had practically represented the world for so many years.

But Hobson, finding himself completely at a loss, was ready to follow the slightest clue. Bradshaw, like Lester, had declined from the beginning to admit even the possibility of Edith's guilt; but he realized nevertheless that there was negative evidence in existence against her which, though it might not place her life in peril, yet might embitter it irrevocably. And, as far as lay in his power, he resolved to save her.

"I have been studying the geography pretty carefully," he explained to his companion when the lighting of a new cigar aroused him from a reverie. "There is a tree which looks conveniently into that window. A boy who is accustomed to birds'-nesting might fix himself up comfortably."

"Perhaps," interrupted Hobson, acidly, "you could suggest something suitable to a man of forty-five who suffers from rheumatism?"

"I haven't any rheumatism," replied the American, cheerfully, "and I guess I can climb that tree. I will tell you a fairy tale about what I see afterward. Things ought to be reasonably quiet at the Hall about eleven; and if we reach there half an hour later, that will do. Smoke!" and he handed over a Havana from his waistcoat pocket, "but don't talk to me; I want to figure things some more."

And so they sat again in silence, until presently Bradshaw looked at his watch and closed it with a snap.

"Ten past eleven," he said. "Twenty minutes' walk to the Hall. Come along, partner, we had better make a move."

They went down-stairs softly. "Jolly Jim" Jones was just clearing away the empty tankards of his village customers.

"Going out to breathe for awhile, boss," said Bradshaw. "Don't worry about me; I have my key."

"All right, sir. You won't take a drop of my special to keep the cold out before you go?"

"No, thank you, I have people dependent on me in the United States. Good night."

The country lane was utterly deserted. It was silent enough to ears not tuned to the myriad voices of the night — the chirp of the cricket, the rustling

of a dry leaf as an errant breeze kissed it, the trembling of a branch touched by a weazel gliding forth on foray, the sudden soft whir of wings as an owl swept down on its prey, the stirring of the undergrowth in the Park by the unseen animals which abounded in its fastnesses.

And so the two advanced, as noiselessly as possible, until there came a fitful gleam between the trees. It was the light for which they had come to look; the light which had shone night after night — telling what story? Perhaps only the story of a mother's anguish — the anguish of a mother whose son was coming home with dimmed eyes and faltering steps. All this Bradshaw thought of, but he thought of Edith Holt too, and went on.

A short cut through the woods and they found themselves beneath the lighted window. There was an oak which spread its branches close to the room, thirty feet above. Without a needless word, Bradshaw drew his companion close to the trunk and climbed upon his shoulders to reach the first stout limb of the tree.

Once within the boughs, the American climbed up like any school-boy, and settled himself on the branch nearest to the window, perching precariously at the extreme limit of safety. He found that the window was closed; therefore, nothing could be heard, yet the scene within the room offered ample

material for speculation when he came to ponder on it afterwards.

Harry Warren, looking utterly cowed, was sitting in an arm-chair, while his mother stormed up and down the room like a very fury. There was, through all her anger, the repression characteristic of the woman. It was no exaggeration to say that she stormed, yet her voice was never raised; strain his ears as he might, Bradshaw could hear no syllable of the conversation. He waited until he grew cramped and until Hobson beneath was hoarsely impatient, and still Mrs. Warren talked with fiery animation, but always, it seemed, with her natural restraint.

Then, at last, she quitted the room. Her son, who had sat dejected and nervous during the harangue, jumped up alertly. He pulled open drawer after drawer of the desk and searched them so frantically, with such bungling haste, that he did not notice his mother's return. She entered, with a certain stealth, and stood behind him, impassive as ever. Warren apparently found what he sought and thrust it guiltily into his pocket. And so the incident might have rested a mere matter between Harry Warren and his mother, if Bradshaw had not coughed. It was a little cough, altogether too slight to be noticed, one would have thought.

Mrs. Warren laid a caressing hand on her son's

shoulder, seeming to reason with him. Then she stooped to one of the drawers he had ransacked, and, turning swiftly, fired point-blank through the glass at the figure she could see dimly outlined in the branches of the oak.

CHAPTER XVI

A NIGHT OF STRANGE INCIDENTS

As the shot rang out, Bradshaw fell crashing through the branches, clutching frantically at boughs and twigs in his descent, stripping away the young bark and searing the palms of his hands into patches of white-hot agony. But it was one of those cases in which a man must break either his fall or his neck, and the American's sympathies were largely in favor of the first alternative. Nevertheless, during fifteen feet of a sheer drop there was only thin air between himself and mother earth, and this distance he fell like a stone, landing heavily at Hobson's feet. Luckily the ground was soft, and he stood up in an instant, apparently sound in limb and otherwise fit for action, except that he was breathless.

"Quick!" he gasped, dragging the detective close under the shadow and shelter of the house. Not a moment too soon were they. Mrs. Warren had thrown up the window now and was firing shot after shot into the gloom where Bradshaw had fallen.

"Keep cover," gasped Bradshaw again, "or you

are liable — to get filled — full of holes. That bullet — whizzed past my ear — like a toy cyclone."

"I thought you were killed when you fell as you did," murmured Hobson. "I suppose you were startled and lost your hold."

"Startled!" The American drew a deep breath or two to test his ribs. "I am not going to be startled any, not if you fire at me with a Gatling gun; but if I had come down in the orthodox manner, mama Warren would have shot me about eleven and a half times before I had climbed a yard. I have read reams about the British matron, and if this is an average specimen I don't wonder that she is highly respected in the bulk. Here," he continued when the house began to gleam with fitful lights, "we had better make ourselves scarce."

Crossing the garden close under the house, they reached a shrubbery and plunged into the thickness of the neighboring firs.

The detective asked if they were to return to the village.

"Don't speak to me," faltered Bradshaw — he had not recovered from his fall yet — "I am working up the right story to meet the situation. We are sure to strike some of those prowling gamekeepers if we keep on, and it won't look natural for us to be running away from the Hall. Now, you strike the drive and hurry back toward the house, while I rest

right here and make myself as tidy as I can under the circumstances. I will call for help presently and put up a big yarn of how I heard the shots fired, and grappled with a man whom I met running from the Hall. I don't like having to admit that any one has licked me, but it can't be helped."

"But why —" began the detective.

"Because I raked in a blow on the forehead from a bough when I fell, and it appears to have bled enough. I must explain it somehow, and I don't see any other way out of the difficulty. Don't you worry. I will arrange a scenario about that fight that will make your hair curl. Don't stop to argue — we are running a risk every moment we delay. Of course, you will say that I strolled part of the way with you, and said good-by a little while before you heard the shots."

Hobson, not quite clear as to the outcome of the affair, hurried off. Left to himself, the American proceeded to arrange the battle-ground, crushing down the softer vegetation and scoring the earth as it might be scored by the feet of men engaged in deadly grapple. The only thing that troubled his imagination was the state of his hands. As far as he could judge from his sensations, there did not appear to be an inch of skin left on the palms. However, he must endeavor not to let them come into evidence. When he thought his efforts had attained

a sufficient degree of realism, he flung himself down and waited, utterly exhausted.

The fall from the tree had shaken him badly, and the cut on his forehead had bled far more profusely than he had told Hobson.

Once or twice, when he caught sight of a moving light in the distance, he shouted, but was evidently unheard. There was nothing for it but to wait until Hobson reached the Hall, when the detective might be trusted to engineer the search parties in his direction.

At last! there came the close sound of footsteps. Bradshaw, in accordance with the part he had to play, raised a feeble call for help. His cry was answered by a quick rush through the undergrowth, and Wilson, the groom, knelt violently on his chest, yelling triumphantly: "I've got him, I've got him!"

"Let go, you blithering idiot!" gasped Bradshaw, tearing away the coarse fingers striving to encircle his throat. "What in thunder do you think you are playing at? I am Mr. Bradshaw."

Wilson peered down at him, trying to pierce the darkness, but he did not relinquish his advantage.

"I want to be sure of that," was his reply, uttered with grim determination. "Besides, even if you are Mr. Bradshaw, what are you doing here at this hour?"

The American was spared any explanation by

the arrival on the scene of Inspector Hobson, Harry Warren, and several servants carrying lanterns and armed with miscellaneous weapons. As the light fell on Bradshaw's pallid, blood-streaked countenance, the detective sprang forward with a well-simulated expression of surprise. Wilson, too, released his prisoner, when he saw it was indeed the nephew of Lord Arncliffe whom he had handled so unceremoniously.

"Good Heavens! Mr. Bradshaw!" cried Hobson with anxious solicitude. "What has happened to you?"

"I am not sure yet whether it was an earthquake or a dynamite explosion," answered the American, rubbing his head ruefully. "I heard two or three shots fired shortly after we parted. I ran back toward the Hall to find out what the trouble was. Then I heard some one making his way rapidly through the wood. Naturally enough, in view of the shooting, I tried to stop him; but," and he glanced at his torn and blood-spattered clothes, "I think he must have regarded my interference as impertinent. But do, for goodness' sake, my dear fellow, help me up to your rooms, and let me wash some of the dirt out of my eyes. My friend appears to have given it to me good and hard, and just at present I feel like walking on air."

He looked and felt really on the verge of collapse.

It was only by leaning heavily on the shoulders of Wilson and the detective that he was able to walk the short distance to the Hall. When the cortège arrived there, an eager crowd of women were waiting for tidings. Mrs. Warren, unruffled as though she had been shooting at clay pigeons, still had the revolver in her hand, and Bradshaw noticed with the quick appreciation of a man who has carried a "gun" all his adult life, that it was of a caliber built to kill. Your man of the frontiers has no use for the "deadly toy" so beloved of the lady novelist.

Edith, in a dressing gown, and with her glorious hair rippling over her shoulders, was endeavoring to calm the fears of the huddled maids, and to soothe Mrs. Aingier, who was tearfully protesting that she would never have left her own home had she known she was to be continually murdered in her bed. The young mistress of Arncliffe made so fascinating a picture that Bradshaw, who at once found himself an object of tender solicitude, would willingly have lingered near her despite the pain he was suffering.

Hobson, however, silenced all questioning and hurried the American to his room. The stains of moss on Bradshaw's boots and clothes would suggest tree-climbing to the least astute of observers, and both were glad when the door of the bedroom closed behind them. Harry Warren had followed,

but Hobson got rid of him for a moment by begging him to fetch brandy. He obliterated the tell-tale marks during Warren's absence with a few deft strokes of a clothes-brush and a rub with a damp towel.

"Give me a big drink — a real big drink," said the American.

He drank thirstily from the glass Warren handed to him, and then shook himself, with tentative twistings.

"That's better," he cried with a nod of approval. "I will be a man again in two minutes. Just bathe this cut on my head, will you, Hobson?"

He leaned over the basin with his burning hands in the water, and experienced a delicious sense of relief. In reality, they were not nearly so badly injured as the intense pain led him to suppose. When Hobson had finished with him, covering the ugly gash on his forehead with a strip of plaster, he looked comparatively respectable again.

"We are still in the dark, sir," the detective reminded him, "as to how you came to be so badly used — in the dark, that is, as to details of the attack upon you."

"Come down-stairs," answered Bradshaw, "and I will explain the whole business. I am feeling quite fit now, and there is no need for me to tell the story a dozen times over. He was well aware that

it is difficult, if not impossible to, relate a "tall yarn" more than once, without some little deviation from its original beauty. Like a conjuring trick, such an effort of the invention should never be submitted to the same audience twice.

He was no more shy than the majority of his fellow-countrymen, but he found the situation decidedly embarrassing. Wilson had already described a blood-curdling combat in the depth of the woods. When its hero appeared, interestingly pale, and with just enough of disorder in his appearance to support Wilson's story, he was overwhelmed with attention.

Edith herself led him to an armchair and tenderly placed a cushion beneath his aching head. Then she sat beside him, and, with all a woman's admiration of a brave man dilating her eyes, begged for particulars of this latest outrage. This unnerved him. He felt he must gain time.

"Why, really, Miss Holt, the matter is of no consequence, so far as I am concerned," he protested. "Won't you tell me, what caused the shots I heard — has any one been injured?"

"No. Mrs. Warren noticed a man in the tree outside her window, and, as she has provided herself with a pistol since we have had so much trouble here, she bravely fired at him. He fell from the tree, but he has escaped. No doubt the police will

find him. How came you to be so dreadfully injured, Mr. Bradshaw? Could it be the same man who attacked you?"

So, for the sake of the sweet girl who was hanging on to his words, Bradshaw was forced to carry through his disagreeable task. "It is nothing to make a song about," he said. "I had strolled part of the way with Mr. Hobson, and, soon after the shots were fired, I intercepted some one who evidently had urgent business in another direction. But don't make me talk about it, Miss Holt. I have been soundly licked. The proud crest of the American eagle is drooping; the Stars and Stripes are trailing in the dust!"

"Oh, do try to be serious for once, Mr. Bradshaw, and tell us what actually happened. Do you think you could identify your assailant if you saw him again?"

"My belief is," answered the American, solemnly, "that he was a grizzly bear. Mercy!" as Edith held up a threatening finger, "I will tell you everything. He was a very powerful man — I am pretty strong myself, and he handled me as if I were an infant — but I should not know him again. We rolled over, I guess, two or three times; and then he managed to hit me on the head with a club he was carrying. The subsequent proceedings interested me no more."

Bradshaw, as he warmed to his subject, brought a little action into the recital, and, in doing so, betrayed his bruised and cut fingers.

"Oh, your poor hands!" cried Edith in horror. "How did you hurt them so?"

The "tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive" appealed strongly to the poetic soul of Sir Walter Scott, and the same great thought came into the mind of William L. Bradshaw.

"Good land!" he murmured to himself, "if ever I get out of this tangle I will tell the truth for a month!"

Still, he had by no means reached the end of his resources. "Oh," he exclaimed with easy confidence, "that was caused by the stick he hit me with. I got hold of it, after parrying one blow, and we had a tough struggle for its possession. But he was too strong for me, and he wrenched it through my hands. I think it was one of those sticks with spikes on them you call blackthorns. I have seen Irish immigrants carrying them in New York."

Edith drew in her breath with a little hiss, as though she pictured the agony of the moment, and looked at him with undisguised admiration. In fact every one in the company regarded him as a paladin, none more sincerely than Detective-Inspector Hobson.

"It so crippled my hands for the moment," went

on Bradshaw, entering into the spirit of the thing, "that I could not hold him. It was then that he got his blow home."

"So," said Edith, severely, "you had nothing to defend yourself with against that dreadful stick — I know what they are like — and yet you gallantly tried to stop him. Mr. Bradshaw, I think," she asserted, with a delightful sincerity, "you are the bravest man I have ever met!"

The American cast a piteous glance toward Hobson, who was eyeing him with malicious enjoyment. No succor was to be expected from that quarter. The detective had not forgotten certain allusions to "idiots" and "men with the instincts of a horse-thief." Far from coming to Bradshaw's rescue, he added to the chorus of praise showered upon him.

"You may well say that, Miss Holt," he broke in earnestly. "If you had seen the place where we found this gentleman you would have thought there had been a battle between two lions. The ground was so torn and trampled that they must have been at it for a quarter of an hour at least. And the blood Mr. Bradshaw had lost!"

The wounded "lion" uttered a queer little cough. It conveyed a warning to Hobson, but the detective was desperate. He would pay off old scores that night, at any rate.

"There is one thing which may give us a clue,"

said Edith. "Do any of you know a man in the district who carries a blackthorn?"

"Yes, miss," volunteered Wilson, "Bob Leigh, the poacher, him that Master Harry caught and gave six months to last year — he is hardly ever without one in his hands. He would only be out of prison a few weeks, and no doubt he bears a grudge against Master Harry. There's another thing, miss, he is a mortal strong man; there's no one in the village can stand up against him."

"Then that completely proves it!" asserted Edith, calmly ignoring the first principles of justice. "You had better go and arrest the man at once, Mr. Hobson."

"Oh, dash it all!" broke in Warren, excitedly, too agitated by this new peril to realize that his mode of address left much to be desired, "you can't arrest a man for having a blackthorn stick."

Except for a contemptuous curl of her lip, Edith appeared as though she had not heard him. "At once, Mr. Hobson," she repeated.

Warren's anxiety on behalf of the poacher was not lost on the detective. This development was likely to prove highly embarrassing to himself, however, so he welcomed any diversion.

"Mr. Warren is quite right, Miss Holt," he pointed out. "We require more evidence than that before we are justified in making an arrest. Still,

I will institute some inquiries as to his movements, and keep an eye on him generally."

Bradshaw, too, was glad to divert attention from his homeric combat. "It is absolutely impossible for me to identify the man," he joined in. "Therefore, I could not prove anything against him, even if we were to get hold of the right person by chance. Now, Miss Holt, I think I will go back to the inn. I am ashamed to have given you so much trouble at such an hour."

"Go back to the inn, indeed!" exclaimed Edith, with fine scorn. "I have ordered a room to be prepared for you, and when you have taken this" ("this" was a huge bowl of chicken broth, one of the invalid delicacies provided for Aingier) "you are to go straight to bed."

"But really, I am perfectly well," he protested.

"What? When Mr. Hobson says that your wound bled so dreadfully? Besides," she went on triumphantly, "I have sent a messenger for Dr. Lester, and here he comes. We shall soon see whether you are perfectly well or not."

Lester, knowing the errand upon which the pair had set forth, was naturally in a maze of conflicting theories as to the cause of Bradshaw's injuries. The footman who summoned him told an incoherent story, in which burglars and pistol-shots figured largely.

And now, as he made cursory examination of Bradshaw's hurts, Edith gave a disjointed narrative of the night's doings, interspersing it with lavish appreciation of the American's gallant behavior.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" groaned Bradshaw, when Edith had delivered herself of a particularly warm tribute to his courage.

"Poor fellow!" she whispered to Lester, with tender pity, "he is in pain."

"He had better go to bed at once," said the doctor.

He was anxious to learn the true details of the affair. Moreover, he did not find this almost fulsome eulogy of Lord Arncliffe's nephew particularly gratifying.

"Have you a room ready?" he asked. "Thank you — then I will just go up and make the patient comfortable. And as I wish to prescribe bed very strictly for you, too, Miss Holt, I will say good night."

His manner was formal, even beyond the austerity which medical men assume, and Edith, unaware that her innocent praise of a courageous action had aroused the demon of jealousy, looked at him in pained reproach. But he kept his eyes steadily averted and walked away, supporting Bradshaw, whose other arm was taken by Hobson.

The detective too was burning with curiosity to learn what Bradshaw had seen before he took that

perilous drop from the tree. When the servants had retired Hobson locked the door.

"Now, then," he said, "we must speak softly."

"You are right, my friend," agreed Bradshaw. "I am liable to make use of language which will be all the better for being spoken softly. And see here, you grinning ape, if that irritating smile doesn't leave your face mighty quick, I will shoot it off!"

"May I ask what the joke is?" queried Lester, mildly.

"You tell him, Hobson. If I do, I shall choke before I am half-way through."

Hobson, nothing loath, described their disastrous attempt to spy upon Mrs. Warren and her son. He told of the American's brilliant idea of explaining his injuries, and, with loving touch, drew a picture of the unearned increment of glory which had fallen to the amateur detective's lot. By the time the recital was finished, Hobson and Lester were convulsed with silent mirth, while the unfortunate hero of it all sat on the bed and glowered at them.

Lester had been telling himself that there was nothing so wonderful in collaring a man, and getting the worst of the encounter. But now, when Bradshaw's ridiculous position was made clear, he was not wholly displeased that Edith had showered her praises so liberally.

"All right," grumbled Bradshaw, "laugh away —

I suppose one must not expect any sympathy from a licensed assassin and a — a detective. I was trying to think of something nasty to say to you, Hobson, and I think I have struck it. And now, if the professional murderer will be so good as to bandage up my head and hands properly, I should like to go to sleep."

Lester, still smiling, attended to him, but Hobson, true to his craft, anxiously asked for details of the scene in Mrs. Warren's room.

Bradshaw took inadequate vengeance by piquing the detective's curiosity. It was only when he felt that he would really like to sleep that he condescended to explain matters.

"Well," he said, "when first I looked into the window, young Warren was evidently in a pretty bad frame of mind. He look thoroughly scared over something. His mother seemed to be trying to pacify him. After a few minutes she went out of the room for a moment, and her son began rummaging in the drawers, presently finding something which he put in his pocket. Meanwhile, Mrs. Warren had returned, and she too took something from one of the drawers of the desk. I did not see what it was, but, as she started shooting at me right then, I am willing to believe it was a revolver."

"What was it her son took out? Could you see that?"

"Well," replied Bradshaw, "it was an article of a very queer shape, and a very queer color — in fact all sorts of colors, like a soap-bubble. And I am quite certain it was a bottle of some sort."

CHAPTER XVII

A TROUBLED IDYLL

Lester remained at the Hall all night. After such a disturbance he was not surprised to find only the servants stirring when he went down-stairs about ten o'clock. He strolled out on to a long balcony which overlooked the broad, smooth lawn, and presently came upon Aingier, now a hearty convalescent, who had been wheeled out to enjoy the fresh morning air.

He had slept soundly enough through the excitement of the previous night, and it was not thought advisable to agitate him with a recital of the latest outrage. Lester chatted absently for a time with the old lawyer. His thoughts were fixed on Edith, and he reproached himself bitterly for the absurd jealousy which had led him to treat her so coldly. In other words, though he would not admit it, the ridiculous position in which Bradshaw was placed put an entirely different complexion on affairs.

In the midst of a discussion anent the state of the money-market, Lester was surprised to find his companion giving vent to a series of dry chuckles. For

a moment, he wondered whether the injury to his head had affected the old man's reason.

"Just as it should be," said Aingier, rubbing his hands, "just as it should be! The finest possible way out of a difficult situation!"

"But, really, I don't understand —"

"Look," whispered Aingier, clutching Lester's arm, and pointing downward into the grounds.

Lester's eyes followed and he stood rigid, as though frozen by the sudden chill which fell on his heart. In the distance were Edith and Bradshaw; but the distance was not so great that he could not see the American's arm linked affectionately within that of his companion.

"The best thing that could have happened," cackled old Aingier again.

Lester was not sorry that the solicitor was too absorbed in his own chatter to notice his agitation. His day-dream was shattered. The sunlit landscape suddenly became gray in his eyes.

"It is quite clear that Lord Arncliffe's nephew has strong moral claims. Under these new conditions, it looks very much as though the property will belong to both of them. I am delighted!" went on the other.

"Yes, yes!" said Lester, striving to keep his voice steady. "As you say, one of the best things that could have happened."

The couple strolling beneath were near at hand now. Edith was smiling up at her companion, with more of careless merriment in her face than her lover had seen there since that first meeting in the park.

"The best thing that could have happened," he repeated dully. Though Aingier rattled on, Lester was too absorbed in his own thoughts to hear or care what was said. He realized, with a soul-shaking pang, that this was, indeed, the natural solution of the difficulties created by Bradshaw's appearance on the scene. Love-blinded, he had never for a moment thought of such a development. What a fool he had been! Edith, of course, by this means would do justice to Lord Arncliffe's nephew and at the same time retain her proud position as mistress of Arncliffe Hall. And the American was a nice fellow and a good fellow and — his thoughts flying to the thinning hair of his own temples — a somewhat younger-looking and more attractive man than himself. He passed through an inferno of agony before he was able to address the lawyer in his usual quiet tones.

"I must be off now — good-by."

He strode away from the balcony and made for the entrance hall. He must be alone. He felt that his face would betray him, though he was unaware of the extent to which that sudden anguish had

carved its record. He was ashen pale, with the peculiar grayness which pallor brings to the cheek of a deeply bronzed man, and his eyes were contracted as though some sudden light had dazzled them.

He took his hat and went out. There was a turquoise sky; the breeze was gentle and balmy; a little way off an angel-throated thrush was singing the story of the sunshine; wherever Lester's gaze wandered, gay flowers flaunted themselves shamelessly at him. The very joyousness of nature smote him with a sense of outrage. Almost he could have wept. But the sound of a liquid laugh brought him back into defiant manhood; when, a moment later, he met Edith and the American, still arm in arm, there was little except his extreme paleness to betray the ordeal he was undergoing.

"You see I have cheated you," called Bradshaw, gaily, as they approached.

"My dear fellow," said Lester, "this is really very imprudent of you. There is nothing serious the matter, but a cut like that may develop erysipelas, if you don't take care. You ought to have remained in bed at least twenty-four hours."

"So I have been telling him, Dr. Lester," began Edith, instantly pausing, however, as she noticed his expression. She had intended to exact humble repentance for his manner at their last parting, but

now such trivialities were forgotten. He must be ill, she thought, looking up at him with tender anxiety.

Lester met her gaze with calmly inscrutable eyes. There was nothing of resentment in them; nor was there any sign of that wondrous telegraphy Edith expected to meet, and she began to feel deeply wounded. Then, all at once, her face and neck were flooded with crimson. She had just realized that Bradshaw was still clinging to her arm with apparent affection.

She drew away, blushing yet more furiously. The action in itself was guilty, and it seemed to her that there came a gleam of contempt into Lester's eyes and that his mouth hardened. Yet she met his gaze truthfully and steadfastly, though she felt it was crushing her, and it was Lester who at length retired from the moral contest. After all, it was cowardly to shame a woman, whatever the circumstances.

"Pray make this unruly patient return to his bed, Miss Holt," he said, in tones so unimpassioned that they chilled Edith more than any reproach. "It is hopeless to expect that he will obey me, but perhaps you may be more successful. And now I will thank you for your hospitality, and say good-by. I have some important business which requires a return to my rooms at once."

"But you have not had any breakfast," faltered Edith, not unwilling to detain him until an opportunity for explanation might arise.

"That is not a very serious matter," he said with a polite smile. "Good-by. And do send Mr. Bradshaw to bed."

He was gone, without even shaking hands. Edith was so dazed that Bradshaw's conversation sounded to her like some distant murmuring which she answered mechanically. A mention of Lester aroused her.

"Do you know," he said, "I think Lester looks frightfully ill?"

"Oh, no," she protested. "You see he did not have much rest last night."

"Such a man as Lester does not look as if he had swallowed an eel because of a lost beauty sleep," persisted Bradshaw with somber pessimism. "I have seen a lot of tribulation among my fellow-sinners, and when one of these iron men, like Lester, exhibits that sort of look on his face, it generally means he has got it in the neck good and hard."

"I do wish to goodness you would endeavor to speak English!" exclaimed Edith, petulantly. "I don't suppose there is anything the matter with Dr. Lester. However, we do know that you are an invalid, so you will oblige me by doing as you are told and return to bed at once. No, no!" as Brad-

shaw began to protest. "I won't have any insubordination. Go to bed! Your breakfast shall be sent up to you. And you are not to get up again until to-morrow morning."

"Are you going to nurse me?" asked Bradshaw, hopefully.

"Certainly not — there are two trained nurses in attendance on Mr. Aingier, and one of them can very well be spared to look after you. Now I must go and see about household affairs. Poor Mrs. Warren cannot be fit for much after her alarming experience. Don't you think she showed remarkable presence of mind?"

He looked at her reproachfully. Without another word, he walked away to his room, with a pretense of offended dignity.

Edith did not attempt to "see about household affairs." She had reached the conclusion that what women call a "good cry" was absolutely essential. Directly she was free from the restraint of Bradshaw's presence, she rushed to her room and, flinging herself face downward on her pillow, began to sob bitterly.

The simple facts of the case were that the American, afraid lest the details of his escapade would eventually leak out, decided that an explanation coming from himself would place him in a far less ridiculous light than if some other person made the

disclosure. He therefore made a clean breast of the whole affair to Edith, telling his story with so much naïve humor that, although she strongly disapproved of his conduct in spying on Mrs. Warren and her son, Bradshaw escaped lightly on that score. Best of all, he succeeded in making Edith laugh with him rather than at him.

So much for the bright looks to which Lester so unreasonably objected. As for the linked arms, the explanation was one which might satisfy the most jealous of lovers. Bradshaw, to excite sympathy, and to start well, had basely pretended to be weak, and Edith, in all innocence and womanly tenderness, insisted that he should lean upon her arm. Bradshaw would have been more than human had he resisted such an offer from the lovely young woman who had more than half won his heart. Still, trivial as the incident was, it was enough to put a serious barrier between Edith and George Lester. She was too proud to justify a perfectly innocent action, and he, equally proud, had the question of Edith's fortune brought vividly before him.

The feelings of Edith, when her fit of weeping had abated a little, underwent some change. At first, her emotion had been pure grief that the person she loved best on earth could misjudge her so cruelly. But now anger assumed its sway. It was no longer "How could he?" but "How dared he?"

He ought to have trusted her implicitly. One thing was certain: nothing would ever bring things back to the old level. Everything was at an end between them.

And what of Lester? He, too, regarded the one romance of his life as irrevocably ended. At an age when most young men are falling in and out of love, he had been making medical history in the African swamps and jungles. Hence, when he did catch the disease, he developed it seriously. Its symptoms were simple enough. Presently, when the first smart had worn off, he would try to find some scientific explanation of it, probably coming to the conclusion that the severity of his attack was due to the fact that he had not been "immunized" by previous inoculation from Cupid's shafts.

At first he decided to leave Arncliffe at once and seek distraction in travel and hard work. He even went so far as to pay his bill at the inn and send the bulk of his luggage to the station. Then he remembered that the mystery of Lord Arncliffe's death was still unsolved, and while that was the case Edith remained in peril. No, he must remain and see it out.

While he was coming to this decision, Edith was alarming herself with the possibility that he might go away and never, never return. He had looked dreadfully ill. Edith, with a shudder, recalled

Bradshaw's expressive opinion of Lester's state. She proceeded forthwith to kill her lover with typhoid fever, at the same time drawing so moving a picture of herself living alone and unwed, for his dear sake, that she began to weep again with unimpaired vigor.

There came a sharp tap at her door, and she sprang up, instinctively putting her hands to her hair, and rushing to the looking-glass.

"What is it?" she called, "I am dressing."

"A young lady has arrived, miss, and she is waiting —"

"No, she is not," broke in a clear, musical voice. "Here I am, Edith. Do let me in, there's a dear!"

Edith ran eagerly to the door. The next instant she was clasped in the arms of a radiant young beauty, who greeted her with genuine affection. This was the friend to whom Edith had written in one of the letters purloined by Hobson.

"You poor darling!" exclaimed the visitor, breathlessly. "I could not wait down-stairs. I felt I had to come to you at once."

"How good of you to come, dear Phyllis," said Edith, returning her affectionate glance. "I have not been able to exchange two ideas with a woman for ages. Mrs. Aingier, the wife of my trustee, has taken it into her head to regard me as a monster of iniquity; and although Mrs. Warren, the house-

keeper, has shown me many thoughtful kindnesses, she is so unemotional that one might as well make friends with a fish."

"I know," nodded Phyllis; "I saw her — a stately old party with a face like a graven image. She looked respectful disapproval when I rushed up here without even waiting to be properly announced. But tell me all about yourself — why, you bad girl! I do believe you have been crying!"

There was a marked contrast between the two girls. While "beautiful" was the term invariably applied to Edith, no one ever thought of calling her companion anything but "pretty." And ravishingly pretty she was — small, but exquisitely proportioned, and having that deadly combination of demure eyes and saucy mouth which works such havoc on impressionable man. She was fashioned by nature to be a breaker of hearts.

Edith's lips began to quiver again. Phyllis, sitting on the edge of the bed, drew her to her side with motherly tenderness.

"There, now," she whispered soothingly, "tell me all about it. Surely you are not allowing the tittle-tattle of a lot of spiteful and envious people to upset you?"

"No, it is not that."

"But, Edith," interrupted her friend severely, "you are not going to tell me you are crying on

account of a mere man? I have a shrewd suspicion that your dear doctor is responsible for all this?"

Edith's pride came to the rescue. She would not have it supposed she was wearing the willow on Lester's account.

"Oh, dear no!" she said, with an airy indifference that was, perhaps, a little too marked. "There is absolutely nothing between Dr. Lester and myself."

"That settles it," remarked Phyllis, nodding her head with an air of sage conviction. "My dear girl, I have been in love thousands and thousands of times, while I positively believe this precious doctor is the first man you have ever looked at twice. Your childlike efforts to deceive me are quite useless, so you had better tell me the truth. Besides, I am counsel's opinion in matters of this sort." Herein Miss Phyllis did herself no more than justice. She was probably the most outrageous flirt in the Three Kingdoms.

"Oh, Phyllis," murmured Edith, abandoning her policy of concealment, "he has treated me so cruelly, so infamously."

"I know, I know," answered the expert, soothingly, "they always do. But what has he done? There is not another woman, is there?"

"Certainly not!" said Edith, scornfully. "Do you suppose I would waste a second thought on any man who could be capable of such conduct?"

"Don't be too trustful, my child. Men are capable of anything. However, if there is not another woman in the case, the obvious and only conclusion is that there is another man."

"Phyllis, how dare you?" Edith's cheeks were aflame with indignation.

"Pooh! Bless its good little heart! Did it never have a flirtation in all its life? Come, now, tell me about the other man. Why, an occasional touch of jealousy will do your excellent doctor a world of good!"

Thus adjured, Edith told the story of her stroll in the grounds with Bradshaw, and the subsequent misconstruction of her harmless action by Lester. Women are far less reticent than men in affairs of the heart, and Edith was so absorbed in drawing a dramatic picture of her lover's awful sternness that not until the end of her story was reached did she become aware that her sworn friend was convulsed with merriment.

"I did not expect this of you at least, Phyllis," said Edith, deeply hurt.

"Oh, you dear baby — you will kill me! Why, don't you see that this is one of the best things that could have happened. Your doctor is probably calling himself a brute by this time, and thinking of all sorts of plans for a reconciliation. Now, when you meet him, you must have a sort of 'wounded

animal' look in your eyes, and yet bear yourself with pathetic dignity. You must avoid being alone with him for some little time, because that would precipitate matters. And, of course, you want to torture him."

"I don't!" exclaimed Edith, with real indignation.

"Be quiet! Yes, you do. And then at last, when you have forgiven him, he will be so abject that you will have him right under your thumb. After that," concluded this implacable chastener of man, "it will be your own fault if you ever let him get up again."

"But I do not want him to be tortured and abject and under my thumb," repeated Edith, emphatically. "I could not respect such a man!"

"Are you afraid of him?" asked Phyllis, bluntly.

Edith looked startled and blushed. "Yes," she whispered reluctantly, "I suppose I am a little bit afraid of him."

"I see — and you rather like it, I expect. I know the type of person — horrid square jaws and mouth cut out of granite. Nasty creature! However, you are evidently quite hopeless. But what a strange thing it is that you, who ordered people about as though you were a queen, and always seemed to get your own way, should glory in having some one to domineer over you."

"Oh!" rejoined Edith, proudly. "I like a man

to be a man! How beautifully fresh and elegant you look," she cried suddenly, changing the subject, as her friend's banter was not wholly to her liking. "No one would dream that you had been traveling all night."

"My dear simpleton, when I had to change at Newcastle, I replaced my traveling dress with this muslin, and underwent a general course of renovation. Somehow, one always looks dusty and bedraggled after a long railway journey, and I was not going to risk meeting some nice man before I had time to make myself presentable."

"Always men — you shameless flirt!" said Edith, with an indulgent smile.

"Of course," said Phyllis, coolly. "And that reminds me, I had to make my choice between beautifying and breakfast. With Spartan resolution, I chose the first. I have had nothing except a glass of milk and an unutterable bun, and I am simply starved."

"Shall we breakfast alone together this morning?" asked Edith. "I generally join Mr. and Mrs. Aingier, now he is convalescent; but —"

"How old is Mr. Aingier," interrupted Phyllis.

"Nearly sixty."

"No other men?"

"No. Mr. Bradshaw has gone to bed again."

"Then we will breakfast with them, by all means.

I should not like any presentable young man to see me eat such a meal as I intend to dispose of. But an elderly personage, and married too, does not count."

The solicitor's age, however, did not prevent her from playing on him with a pair of big, trustful eyes. She could not, for the life of her, avoid this operation. Naturally, the big, trustful eyes inspired Mrs. Aingier with anything but trust, and she regarded this brazen creature with a growing disfavor which nearly culminated in an outburst when her husband patted the curly, brown head with a fatherly hand.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN UNEXPECTED CLUE

THREE days had elapsed since Phyllis Harland's arrival at Arncliffe Hall, and during all that weary time George Lester failed to put in an appearance. Had this lovers' quarrel merely been a case of ordinary jealousy, the happy prophecy of Edith's friend would probably have been fulfilled by Lester seeking an explanation. But the suggestions of the old lawyer as to the suitability of a match between Edith and Lord Arncliffe's nephew had set up a barrier unsuspected by that lively student of the wretch man, Miss Harland.

Edith grew a little more pale and held her head yet a little more erect, but she no longer sought relief in the feminine refuge of tears. Her indomitable pride had come to the rescue, and whenever he should appear she was prepared to treat the laggard penitent with a severity that would satisfy even Phyllis. Before he earned forgiveness Lester would need to be abject indeed.

Did he but know it, the imaginary danger to his happiness created by his needless sensitiveness was

perilously near to becoming a reality. Edith was exceedingly anxious to arrive at some arrangement with Bradshaw, as to the division of Lord Arncliffe's property, and, when the American refused to be treated as an invalid any longer, she sent for him, thoroughly determined to settle things on an equitable basis.

"Now, Mr. Bradshaw," she said, pointing to an armchair with a pretty gesture of command, "you are to sit 'right there,' as you would put it, and you are not to get up again until you have agreed to everything I wish."

He sat down with an air of resignation. "Am I to be fed?" he asked pathetically.

"No, you are to be starved into submission. But my terms are easy. I only want to arrange with you about your share of your uncle's estate."

"But I haven't any share, except that battle-ax with which my illustrious ancestor —"

"Mr. Bradshaw!" exclaimed Edith, impatiently, "I would really like to shake you. You know perfectly well that if Lord Arncliffe had known of your existence, as he should have known, you would be his heir."

"I don't know anything of the sort," said Bradshaw, obstinately. "He had known you and loved you nearly all your life, while he had never even seen me. Besides, I am quite sure if I had any money

to leave, I would much rather leave it to you than to me."

"Cannot you see what a painful position I am in?" pleaded Edith. "It seems as though I have robbed you of your birthright — in fact, you know quite well that people do not scruple to say that I intercepted your letters to Lord Arncliffe."

"Oh, that is altogether ridiculous! Now, do please believe that I am quite satisfied. My uncle made a wise and proper disposition of his money, and I have no idea of interfering with it in any way."

"You must!" insisted Edith.

"Well, Miss Holt," he said deliberately, "there is only one condition on which I will take any share of Lord Arncliffe's property."

"Why, I am quite willing to meet you in every possible way," cried Edith, glad to find that there was some opportunity for compromise. "What is your condition?"

"That you give me yourself with it."

This sudden declaration so startled Edith that she put up her hands as if to shield herself. The very fact of Bradshaw's proposal seemed to accuse her of the disloyalty suspected by Lester.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "Please do not suggest such a thing, Mr. Bradshaw."

"I know you could do a whole heap better," he went on; "but really and truly, Miss Holt, I am not

half a bad chap. And, you know, Americans make the best husbands in the world."

"I am sure you will be a very good husband," replied Edith, kindly, "a good and kind husband for some nice girl who will make you a great deal happier than I could."

Bradshaw, who was deeply moved, spoke with gentle deference. "Miss Holt, if there is anybody else, please forgive me for having made this proposal to you; if there is not, then I beg of you to think the matter over. But pray do not allow yourself to be influenced in the least by your anxiety to share my uncle's wealth with me. I come from a country where men are not happy unless they are working, and it would be utterly impossible for me to lead the life of one of your English country gentlemen. As for money, you may rest assured that I earn quite sufficient for my needs."

"There cannot be any one else," said Edith, almost inaudibly.

Was it not so, in sober earnest? Could Lester have made her suffer had he really loved her? For one brief moment she almost thought of accepting Bradshaw's offer. He was kind and honest and chivalrous, bearing the hall-mark of true manhood no less clearly than did the lover who had discarded her. And it would be an easy way of giving him the inheritance that should be his.

But no! Let Lester deem her false if he chose. She would remain faithful to the troth she had plighted in her heart.

"Well, then think the matter over," repeated Bradshaw. "Meanwhile," he cried gaily, with a quick return to his usual manner, "I really think you had better let me get up."

"Yes, you may get up," said Edith, glad to end a tête-à-tête which had developed so unexpectedly. "And if you will come with me, I will introduce you to the dearest, sweetest, prettiest, and nicest girl in all the world."

"I know her already," murmured Bradshaw, with a look which made Edith hasten their departure.

Miss Phyllis Harland, dressed with elaborate simplicity to support her favorite opening, which was to pose as a demure, timid little maid, was waiting with growing indignation for Edith to present the "nice American." She had arranged herself on a shady garden seat, with a sunbonnet dangling from her rosy fingers, her head thrown back, her lips just parted to show a gleam of pearly teeth, and her long lashes resting on her flushed cheeks. She offered a delightful picture of a tired child fallen into unconscious sleep. When Bradshaw appeared on the scene it was her intention to give him time to take in all the details, and then to raise slowly those long, curved lashes and look at him with

shy, startled eyes. She had never yet known this attack to fail. But the position was trying, and at length, when the pins and needles in her shoulders grew unbearable, she rose to her feet and stamped on the ground pettishly.

At this unpropitious moment Edith and Bradshaw came upon her suddenly from an unexpected direction, and Phyllis, all her elaborate arrangements wasted, shook a mental fist at her friend. Miss Harland had, however, almost as many gambits as a chess expert; if the conditions were unfavorable for the display of appealing trustfulness, her mood of happy, innocent roguishness was none the less fascinating. Edith, silent and distrait, suffered by comparison with her sparkling friend. Bradshaw found Phyllis a companion after his own heart.

Down at the "Fisherman's Rest" George Lester was gloomily debating whether to stay on for awhile or end the whole business by taking the next train to London.

The tide of suspicion seemed to be ebbing away from Edith, and she had a strong and alert protector in Bradshaw. Yet, though it seemed to him that he was irresolute, in reality he had made up his mind to wait for some definite indication of Edith's engagement to the American. During those days he went out little. A meeting with Edith would be painful to both of them, and though Bradshaw, who

had now returned to his quarters at the inn, pressed him to accompany him to the Hall and on various other expeditions, Lester pleaded urgent work in connection with a forthcoming book.

Meanwhile, though fond hearts might suffer, the detective was untiring and unceasing in his efforts to follow up the shadowy clues in his hands.

Leigh, the poacher, and his mysterious accession to wealth, had not been neglected. Hobson, with an ingenious air of good-fellowship, made several attempts to hobnob with him; but Leigh, who had a natural antipathy to policemen in any shape or form, received all advances with churlish silence.

Hobson, nothing daunted, decided to keep him under observation. To this end, he slipped out quietly after Leigh one night when the poacher quitted the tap-room of the inn. But, alas! it is one thing to shadow a man through the streets of a great city, and another to follow on the steps of a trained woodsman whose ear is alert for every crackling twig, and whose eye does not miss so much as a moving leaf. Ere they had covered a quarter of a mile the detective discovered that by some mysterious process his quarry was behind instead of in front of him.

"Lord love you, maister!" said Leigh with genial irony, as he caught up with his tracker, "you ought to keep your eyes open when you are about at this

time of night. Just s'pose now if there was anybody took a grudge against you — thought p'raps you was a-spyin' on him — why, he might come on you, just like I did, and give you a crack on the head without a livin' soul being the wiser."

"You are quite right," agreed the detective, with an appreciation that was hearty without being enthusiastic. "But I am not likely to spy on anybody — I was just trying to find a short cut to the railway station."

"Lies right behind you, sir." Still that galling note of irony.

"How stupid of me! That way, you say? Thanks; good night!"

Hobson turned and walked away with as much dignity as he could command, not sure, even now, that he was entirely safe from that "crack on the head." The blow, indeed, might be met, for he was not the man to shirk a tussle, but the insolent chuckle which the poacher sent after him was gall and wormwood. He, one of the smartest of all the smart men at "The Yard," to be outwitted and jeered at by a mere yokel! However, it was clear that on his own ground the yokel was more than a match for the Londoner, and the Londoner was sufficiently candid to acknowledge it.

Of Lester, on the other hand, the poacher had no mistrust. He had been drawn to the young doctor

from their first meeting in the bar of the "Fisherman's Rest," when he told Lester of that giant trout which came to so untimely an end. A man who dealt with the ever-burning question of beer in so liberal a spirit could not but inspire friendship, and Lester had shown sufficient acquaintance with the coy secrets of the woods and streams to command Leigh's respect.

As a matter of fact, Lester liked the old ruffian, but Hobson so pressed upon him the importance of ascertaining how a man in Leigh's position could be continually changing sovereigns, that, for Edith's sake, he undertook to find out, if possible, whether Leigh was in any way concerned in the recent happenings at Arncliffe Hall.

For a day or two the poacher had been rather less sedulous in his attentions to the home-brewed of Landlord Jones, and the reason was apparent when one afternoon he accosted Lester, who was taking a solitary ramble.

"All the folks around here say that you're a great doctor, sir, a much better man than Dr. Smalley," he said in uneasy compliment. "I've been wondering if you would come and have a look at my old mother. I'd be mortal glad, sir, and I'd pay anythink you like to ask."

"My good fellow," replied Lester, "I am a specialist, and in most cases you would do far better to

consult Dr. Smalley. Still, I will see your mother with pleasure. As for payment, I am on a holiday, and I refuse to work, save in a friendly way, for anybody."

"Thankee, sir." For the first time Lester saw something approaching emotion in the rugged, sinister face of the poacher.

"What is the matter with your mother?"

"Well, sir, she's took to her bed a bit earlier than usual of late, and this mornin' she was very quiet — lay still and followed me about with her eyes without saying a word. Nor she don't care for her cup o' tea or her pipe o' 'bacca as she used to."

"Is she very old?"

"Why, doctor, she might be ninety, or she might be a little more, but she's allus been strong."

"You see," said Lester, gently, "when people reach ninety years of age you must expect all sorts of ailments, and you must be prepared for the worst. At the same time, it is quite possible that with a little care she will be all right again for some time to come. You may be sure I will do my best for her. Would you like me to see her now?"

"If you would be so kind, sir."

They strolled on to that little hovel on the outskirts, where Warren, half mad with fear, had removed the stains of his attack on the solicitor. Lester, on entering, recoiled with disgust from the

horrible atmosphere — an atmosphere which brought vivid recollections of African Kraals.

"Good Heavens, man!" he exclaimed, "no wonder your mother is ill! Why, this air is enough to poison her!"

"Oh, it's the way she's lived all her life. You mustn't judge us folk the same as you would the gentry."

"I know; but — here, won't this window open? Then keep the door wide, for goodness' sake, or I shall be stifled!"

The atmosphere cleared a little, and Lester turned his attention to the old woman lying on the heap of foul rags which served for a bed. He saw at once that she was verging on delirium. There was a vacant uneasiness in her eyes, and she moved her skinny hands about restlessly. She was going to die presently.

"Is that Maister Harry Warren? she asked, peering through the gloom at Lester. "I've got the books safe enough, Maister Warren, I've got 'em safe enough."

"Shut up, mother!" growled the son, savagely. "This is the doctor come to see you. I'm afraid, sir," he explained apologetically to Lester, "she's a bit off her head."

"Oh, no, it isn't the doctor. I may be old, Bob, but I'm not blind yet. It's Harry Warren — War-

ren that got you six months, Warren that tried to murder the old lawyer, Warren that we're mindin' the books for, Warren — why," screamed the aged crone, sitting up and tossing away the white locks from her eyes, "there he is now looking over your shoulder!"

The two men turned involuntarily toward the door as she made her vehement assertion, and both started with astonishment. For there, in very truth, stood Harry Warren, his lips white with fear and his red face haggard.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEREIN LESTER IS CAGED

Warren's burly frame, rigid as a statue, blocked up the doorway. For a moment Lester and the poacher, watchful and immobile, gazed at him. Then the young agent stepped forward and closed the door with a bang. He had the truculent air of one who challenged the right of way.

Lester, to whom danger was no new thing, took in the position at a glance. He stood quietly, only clenching and unclenching his hands with the unconscious movement of the athlete who is presently going to put forth all his strength. He looked toward Leigh inquiringly, but the poacher's eyes were dropped in sullen inability to deal with a difficult situation. So Lester squared back his shoulders, seemingly paying heed to neither man, but really suspicious of both.

"Maister Harry Warren!" cackled the old woman again.

"Shut up, mother!" Leigh's hand was raised now, with the action of the coster who threatens a blow without meaning it.

"Off her head, sir," he explained to Lester again.

"I will send you some medicine for her," replied Lester, calmly professional. "Meanwhile, keep her quiet and try to improve the ventilation a little."

He made to walk toward the door, with seeming indifference, and, though he knew it was coming, the clutch of Leigh on his arm sent something of a chill through him.

"Is there anything else you want to ask me?" he asked suavely.

Warren was looking on with white-hot eyes.

"Oh, good God, Leigh," he broke out, "we can't let him go!"

Lester wrenched himself free and stood, back to the wall, with all his muscles tense.

"Who will stop me?" he asked, with the tense note in his voice of the man who will kill if needs be. The agent did not answer. He had already tasted something of the young doctor's methods. Although he did not lack brute courage, previous experience counseled prudence.

"Well now, Maister Lester," began the poacher, "you see —"

"I see that there is something I am going to investigate," interrupted Lester, sternly. "I don't know how far you are concerned in it, but if you take my advice you will refuse to be concerned any

further. And now open that door, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Oh, come, sir," growled Leigh, with some of that crude irony which had so galled Hobson. "You mustn't give your orders as though we were a lot of servants. If you come here as the friend of the Romany people, you must do as they tell you."

"You are not telling the truth," interjected Lester, sharply. "I came here at your request to do you a service; and you are now acting like a treacherous cur. Don't think that you and your fellow dog there can hold me. I am quite man enough to deal with two pariahs of your type."

Lester's withering glance made Leigh draw back — the shrinking of brawn from blood — and Lester strode to the door. There stood Harry Warren, still barring the way, and Lester, with old contempt and reawakened antipathy, put up a scornful hand.

"Let me pass," he said curtly, and then, as Warren did not move: "Get out of my way, you fool. *You* cannot hinder me!"

For an instant he glowed with the instincts of the primeval savage. Warren, not deficient in pluck, leaped warily to meet him and parried a glancing blow which took a square quarter of an inch from one of his eyebrows. Lester drew back and gathered himself to hit again. He had forgotten all about possible interference by the gypsy, and it

came to him as a shock when he found his next effort restrained by a grip which might have belonged to the grizzly bear of Bradshaw's imagination.

The poacher flung him into a corner as though he were a baby, and Lester lay gasping for a minute. Then he sprang up, indomitable as ever, and ready to face two enemies where he had expected only one. He saw the horrible odds against him; the poacher, a comparatively old man, but strong as Samson, strong, that is, in a confined space, where one came within his grip, and Warren too, with the bull-like strength of the young countryman — a strength to be met by an alert man and a brave man, but not in the narrow limits of a hovel which did not permit of six feet of free movement from end to end.

"You hound!" shouted Lester, turning to Leigh and grinding his teeth, "you hound! You asked me to your house to attend your mother who was ill. You made me your guest. And now you treat me like this. I have lived long enough in the world to mistrust everybody, but this is the first time I have encountered a wretch of your sort. I did not think you would trade on your mother's illness to betray me!"

The gypsy took a step toward Lester. "Don't tempt me, don't tempt me!" he cried hoarsely. "I

am friendly toward you, but I won't take insult from any man."

"Won't you?" said Lester, his back to the wall again; and he faced the two men — one a towering figure, sullen but determined, and the other, malevolent, half crouching to spring upon him. "Won't you? Then open your door and move that oaf from in front of it."

Lester stepped forward, but the bear's hug of the old poacher was around him. He struggled desperately but ineffectively. There was no room. Nevertheless, he forced Leigh close to the bed on which the old woman lay dying. And then Warren stepped forward and hit him a crushing blow behind the ear.

Lester dropped, and lay a limp bundle between his two assailants. Leigh sprang upright, his great hand gripping deep into Warren's shoulder.

"I won't have him hurt," he vociferated.

"You fool!" snarled Warren, contemptuously, "can't you see that he will ruin us?"

"Ruin *you!*" retorted the poacher. "He can't ruin me."

"Can't he?" retorted Warren, ferociously. "What do you suppose people will think? They will say, if it comes to the worst for me, that I hired you to attack old Aingier, and you can't turn King's evidence against me on that. What are we to do

with the body?" — and he kicked the prostrate figure.

"No, no!" exclaimed Leigh with an oath. "I'll do no murder on your account."

Warren straightened himself. "Look here," he said, "this is not a game of cricket. You and I are both likely to get into a mess over it. You have secured the books which can injure me, but if I choose to do so I can easily make you responsible for the assault on Aingier, however much I may suffer personally. You are going to have your thousand pounds in a week or so, and if this interfering brute," pushing Lester's prostrate body with his foot again, "were to disappear for good, there is nobody to bring it against us."

"I won't have it," said Leigh, obstinately. "He's been a real gentleman to me, and I have acted toward him like a dirty skunk."

"Well, what other course is open? Are you going to wait for that meddlesome police inspector to come down and arrest both of us? Think, man, think! Don't you see that this doctor who came here from nowhere must be put out of the way?"

During this conversation, Lester lay huddled on the floor where he had fallen, while the old crone on the bed muttered childishly that they were "makin' a rare to-do about them books."

"I am not a murderer, Maister Warren," went on

Leigh, doggedly, "but I want that thousand pounds from you, and when you give it to me you can have the books and go your own road. Still, I can see we must keep the doctor quiet, and I know where to keep him quiet if only we can get him there. There is the empty shooting-box at Foxgill —"

Warren knew now that all his raving would not move Leigh. So, perforce, he fell in with the half-suggested plan.

"There is my dog-cart down the road" he said, "and we can reach Foxgill in less than an hour. Guarantee to keep him quiet. Once the books are destroyed, he can say what he likes. It is only his word against mine."

Leigh gave a gruff assent. They wasted no further time in discussion, but hoisted Lester, still insensible from Warren's cowardly blow, into the dog-cart and covered him over with the knee-cloth. The hour was late, and the shadows were deepening. Nevertheless, though they were not likely to meet many wayfarers on the road they followed, it was desirable, from their point of view, that they should get clear of the outskirts of the village as soon as possible.

Aingier had complained of Warren's reckless driving, but had he been in the trap on this occasion, he would probably have turned gray for the second time in his life. Warren lashed the mare until she

tore along with a suggestion of panic in her action; but the agent was a splendid whip, and he guided her over the rough road with rare skill.

Onward he urged her for a good five miles, and then he turned on to the moorland. Now over tussocks of grass; now through mole-hills, now actually among the heather, the dog-cart bumped and floundered, but always there was a steady hand on the reins, while the poacher sat beside, steadying Lester's nerveless figure. The mare began to breathe painfully, and Warren perforce slackened the mad pace a little.

"Man alive," he said, for the twentieth time, "can't you realize what a menace this doctor fellow is to us?"

"Go your road, Maister Warren, and I'll go mine," retorted Leigh. "He's a real man is the doctor, and I won't have him hurt. And," he went on with sudden fury, "if you get up to any of your cursed games with him I'll make you repent it."

"My dear fellow," answered Warren, with uneasy compliance, "I don't wish to hurt him. If you keep him quiet for a week or so, that is all I want."

Leigh relapsed into silence. Another couple of miles brought them to one of those roughly built shooting-boxes which are often the only buildings to be found amid the wastes of the northern moors. It was a small tower, roughly built of stone, found in

the vicinity, and containing a few rooms sparsely furnished to accommodate the sportsmen — real sportsmen — who used it. Now, when there was no shooting, it was left without a caretaker.

"I will open a window in a moment," said Leigh, jumping down. Soon the bolts of the front door grated, and he appeared at the entrance. "Now then!" He lifted Lester in his strong arms and carried him in, followed by Warren.

Lester was regaining his senses. He moved his limbs and groaned. Opening his eyes, he looked vacantly around. Then he scrambled unsteadily to his feet, his mind clear to all that had passed up to the moment he was struck down, but in a maze because of his new surroundings. Warren, unable to meet his eye fairly, assumed an expression of sneering contempt. But Lester did not concern himself with the agent. He turned on Leigh with a fury none the less intense that it was repressed.

"Now," he said with biting scorn. "This is blackmail, of course. How much do you want?"

"Nothing from you, sir," retorted the poacher, sturdily. "But you have dropped into some business between Maister Warren and myself — business which makes you dangerous — and you must not blame us if we keep you quiet for a bit."

"If you are able," cried Lester, passionately.

There was a deal chair beside him. He picked

it up and swung it in the air. But his head swam. Leigh took the chair from his hands with what might almost be called gentle courtesy.

"I think we can," said he. "Now, sir, will you promise to stop here quietly until I tell you you can go?"

"You infernal idiot!" broke in Warren.

"Leave me alone," growled the poacher. "I know a gentleman when I see one. Will you promise, doctor?"

"No, by Heaven, I will not!" cried Lester.

"Very well, sir. Then I shall have to shut you up."

Warren dragged the poacher to one side, while Lester, still half-dazed, watched them with the abstract curiosity of a man who sees arrangements being made for his own execution yet cannot appreciate the imminence of his peril.

"You are mad!" he heard Warren say peevishly. "Can't you see that he may attract attention to himself? This place is isolated, I know; but some one may pass."

"I will take care of that," muttered Leigh. He walked back to Lester again.

"Doctor," he said, "a man must look after himself, and if you go scot-free just at present I must suffer for it. You won't promise not to escape. Will you promise to keep quiet?"

"No," answered Lester, shutting his jaws with a snap.

"Then when we leave you here, you will not only be bound, but gagged."

Lester was seething with hot rage, but he saw the determination in the gypsy's eyes, and he was quite alive to the terrible prospect of lying for hours with a gag between his teeth. It was folly to resist under the circumstances, and he was wont to make up his mind quickly.

"Very well," he said. "I will keep quiet for a couple of days, but again I warn you that you will pay bitterly for this outrage."

Leigh wasted no words. "Come along; I know the house," he said to Warren. "Many is the time I have taken refuge here when your cursed game-keepers were after me."

He led the way up to the first floor and into a tiny room entirely bare of furniture.

Lester followed quietly, with Warren at his heels. More than ever did he see the futility of resistance in his present state; therefore he made the best of the situation.

"There you are, sir," continued the poacher. "They are hard quarters for a gentleman, but from what you have told me, I think you have been in harder in your time. And don't forget that I have your word, the word of a gentleman, you won't

make a sound. I will bring you some food to-morrow."

The door had a heavy mortised lock. He shut and locked it with a clang which brought a sinking to Lester's heart, brave as he was. He heard the descending footsteps as Warren and Leigh went away. With a natural instinct, he went to the window and looked out. Forty feet and hard ground at the bottom! No escape that way. And then to the door. But his instrument case had been left behind in Leigh's cottage, and one cannot open a door with a watch chain or a handful of silver. These were the only available metal articles he had in his possession. And then he caught the rattle of wheels and the vicious crack of Warren's whip.

He was alone on the moor, ten miles from anywhere.

CHAPTER XX

BRADSHAW "MAKES GOOD."

WARREN'S mad drive had not passed altogether unnoticed. May Mannering, with a growing appreciation of the qualities of the groom Wilson, was waiting for him in the quietest lane leading out of Arncliffe, the lane which led to Foxgill Moor. She had seen Warren go past with a companion whom she did not recognize. But her quick eye had taken in the bundle under the leather apron; and it seemed to her that there was a projecting foot which could not possibly belong to either Warren or his companion.

She had practically given up all hope of bringing Warren back to his allegiance, and the production of a bank-book, showing a credit balance of close on two hundred pounds, made Wilson distinctly a *persona grata*. So, of course, when Wilson arrived, she told him what she had seen, and the groom, still intensely jealous of Warren, was only too delighted to put a bad construction on the incident.

"Up to some devilment, you may bet," he said, yet really thinking nothing of the matter.

Between Bradshaw and Lester the close friendship which sprang up, although they had known each other for so short a time, was in no way weakened by recent events. Next morning, when the American learned that Lester had not been in the inn all night, he was genuinely disturbed. His first idea was that the young doctor had returned to London, but the presence of Lester's luggage, supplemented by an inquiry at the local station, effectually disposed of that theory. The individual who combined within himself the post of booking-clerk, ticket collector, and station-master at Arncliffe said emphatically that Lester had not been near the station during the past three days. Obviously, he must have gone to the Hall and stayed there. To the Hall Bradshaw went without any delay.

In the grounds he met Phyllis Harland, who, indeed, expected him, and who had arranged a special curl on her forehead for his benefit.

Miss Harland knew perfectly well that he would arrive early. She had made a gratifying conquest in a record time, and the only thing which troubled her was a "nasty, mean, unfair" habit, to use her own adjectives, the American had of making her do as he told her. She was always planning how she would bring him to his knees, but, somehow, her plans just failed. He knelt metaphorically, and pleaded as nicely as she could wish; nevertheless,

his plea always seemed a command. It was intolerable.

Poor Phyllis had tried demureness, sauciness, and trustful dependence, without attaining that tyrannical ascendancy over him which she wished to establish. Now, as a last desperate resort, she tried being natural.

"How are you, Mr. Bradshaw?" she said, holding out her hand and looking at him with frank, honest eyes.

"I am very well," said Bradshaw, "but at the same time very worried. Dr. Lester has disappeared mysteriously, and this neighborhood appears to be so unhealthy that I am rather afraid he may have struck trouble of some sort."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Phyllis. "Poor Edith!"

"Poor Edith?" cried Bradshaw, curiously.

With true masculine density, he had not realized that there was any sort of tender feeling in existence between his friend and the young mistress of Arncliffe.

"How silly men are! And I think you are the silliest of all of them."

"Well, but — " began Bradshaw, rather ruffled.

"Silly, silly, silly! Come and tell dear Edith about Dr. Lester. I am sure the news will nearly kill the poor girl."

"Well," said Bradshaw again, mildly. "Why should it kill the poor girl?"

"Oh!" — Phyllis was out of patience — "if ever I have charge of you —" she stopped in utter confusion, and made what Bradshaw would have called a "bee line" to the Hall.

The American, alternating between effulgent joy and intense gloom, walked at her side. He was wondering whether Edith would relent and accept his proposal. Had it not been for that now appalling possibility, he was capable of prostrating himself at the feet of Miss Phyllis then and there, although he had known her only three days — and, be it confessed, Miss Phyllis was entirely capable of accepting him. She had met what she urgently needed, a man of whom she was afraid.

Edith, sunning herself on the balcony, gave them a smiling welcome, delighted, though, it may be, a trifle surprised, to see the pair such good friends. "Well, young people," she called out brightly.

Phyllis was full of her news. She adored Edith, but there was a breathless joy in telling of Lester's disappearance which overcame all other considerations. She arrested Bradshaw with an imperious gesture. "Stop there!" she said. Then, rushing to her friend and clasping her in her arms, she poured forth a narrative from which little was to be gathered save that some calamity had befallen Lester.

Edith stiffened and drooped her head. The situation justified a fainting fit; but she was not the fainting type of woman, though she had fainted once at the inquest under deep stress. Besides, there was Bradshaw looking on.

"My dear girl," she cried with a forced laugh, "Dr. Lester is not a child. You must not think that because there have been two extraordinary incidents here, the place is abounding in murderers and brigands."

Yet she had become exceedingly pale, and her mouth was awry with what she meant to be a smile of indifference.

"Of course," said Bradshaw, coming to the rescue. "Lester's all right. So far as I could judge him, he is a man who could easily lick his weight in wildcats. At the same time, I'd feel pretty good if he'd put in an appearance."

"Do not let us worry ourselves about Dr. Lester," repeated Edith. "He is, I am sure, quite capable of taking care of himself. If you will come in, Phyllis, I will give you some of the loveliest chocolates you have ever tasted."

Bradshaw, slightly surprised by her seeming flippancy, strolled away with Phyllis toward a flight of steps leading to the veranda. But, when they reached the top, Edith had left the garden to see Wilson, who had sent an earnest request for an interview.

Edith was beloved and respected by all the servants — respected all the more because, whether as Lord Arncliffe's paid secretary or as the mistress of Arncliffe Hall, she had always treated them with the same unfailing and kindly dignity.

"Well, Wilson?" she asked, as the groom stood twirling his cap uneasily in his hand. "What is it?"

"Why, miss, I — I — of course it may be nothing, but I thought it my duty to tell you. I heard down at the inn that Dr. Lester has not been there all night, and something has come to my knowledge which makes me think it possible the gentleman has met foul play."

"Yes," said Edith, wondering what there could be behind all this mystery, "yes, go on!"

"Well, miss, there's a young lady I — I am keeping company with, and last night she saw Master Harry driving like mad with some one in the gig. There seemed to be a sort of bundle under the apron, and she's pretty sure that there was a foot sticking out at the side of the trap, I know it's not my place to speak against Mr. Warren, but there are some queer rumors. Any one could see that Master Harry was jealous of the doctor —"

"That will do, Wilson," interrupted Edith, haughtily. "You will remain here until I return."

She walked back to Bradshaw and Phyllis, out-

wardly calm, but feeling that every onward step was a miracle.

The pair were laughing together, but Edith's haggard face arrested their mirth. She told them what she had heard from Wilson, calmly, as she thought and without emotion, but her mouth was quivering, and her hands, when she unclenched them, trembled pitiably. "What do you think, Mr. Bradshaw?" she concluded, looking up at him with eyes of anguish.

"I think," answered Bradshaw, still dense, as men always are where women are concerned, "I think that things look very black for our friend Lester."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Edith, clasping his hand between hers and forgetting everything save that her lover might be in peril. "Oh, no! But you will save him, won't you? You are so good and brave and strong. Oh, for my sake, save him!"

"Why sure, I'll save him if there's any saving to be done. Can you give me a horse?"

"Oh, yes, of course. A dozen if you like."

"Never could ride more than one at a time," said Bradshaw, cheerily pretending not to notice her emotion. "Perhaps, under the circumstances, Miss Harland will go and order it for me, while I arrange matters with you. And say, Miss Harland, just tell that groom to fix up a horse for himself. I want

him to show me where Mr. Warren was driving that peculiar load."

Phyllis tripped away elegantly. She would be elegant on the Day of Judgment. And when she had gone Bradshaw turned and took Edith's hands in his.

"Little girl," he said gravely, "I think I had better withdraw that proposal of mine. You told me a dreadful fib. There *is* another man, after all. What are you going to do if I bring him back? Will you promise not to say any more nasty things to me about Lord Arncliffe's money?"

"I will promise anything! said Edith, fervently.

Wilson cantered up, leading a horse for Bradshaw, who turned to bid farewell to the two girls.

"Don't worry, Miss Holt," he said. "Ten to one Lester is all right; but if he isn't I will see him through the game."

"But you won't run any risks?" pleaded Phyllis, with the nearest approach to real anxiety she had ever exhibited.

When an Englishman boasts, his hearers put him down rightly as a mere braggart, but it is dangerous to judge an American on the same lines. He may boast, but, in his own language, he "makes good."

"Say," remarked Bradshaw, confidently, "there aren't any two men in the county who are going to get ahead of me when I spread myself."

He swung himself lightly into the saddle, took his hat off, with a kindly smile to Edith and an ardent glance at Phyllis, and cantered off with the easy swing of a horseman bred on the Western prairies.

On to the village; two minutes of hasty chat with Inspector Hobson, who, according to custom, had gone down to the post-office, and then onward, accompanied by Wilson, until he reached the point where May Mannering had seen Warren drive past.

"That will do," said Bradshaw. "I will play a lone hand now. Keep your mouth shut, partner, and you are liable to earn money."

The American trotted slowly along the narrow lane, scanning it closely as he went. There was no trail that it was possible to follow. But he was not looking for tracks, on the road. There were altogether too many of them. What he wanted was an indication of tracks leaving the road. And presently he found them. The line of the dog-cart over the moor was so distinct that he could follow it at a hand gallop. To a man who had ridden the prairies, the inequalities of the ground offered no obstacles. He just hung his rein loose and left matters to the horse.

He held on until he came in sight of the deserted shooting-box, a place built almost like a Martello tower. He pulled up his horse.

"I guess," he murmured softly, and then, as the

face of Leigh appeared at one of the windows, "Surest thing, you know," he added, still quietly. Without further ado, he tethered his horse to a stump and walked briskly toward the door.

Leigh met him. Bradshaw had expected him to meet him, and the two men stood a little apart eyeing each other warily.

"Now," said Bradshaw, in placid self-communing, "if I didn't have a little gun in my pocket, thirty-eight caliber, self-cocking, safety trigger, I'd get licked out of my socks. I wouldn't fight that man in a square rough and tumble for eleven and a half million dollars."

Leigh, however, did not seem inclined to fight. He had often seen Bradshaw at the inn, and he made a clumsy attempt to pass matters over.

"Good day, sir," he said, pulling at his greasy cap.

"I know," replied Bradshaw. "But where is Dr. Lester?"

The gypsy started, and then stepped forward threateningly. "You know too much, maister," he growled.

"Not a bit," said Bradshaw, cheerfully. "You can never learn too much. But you had better show me up to Dr. Lester, who, I presume, is partaking of your hospitality at the present moment."

Leigh cast a comprehensive eye around; he saw

that Bradshaw was alone. The American's lean figure seemed to amuse him.

"Maister," he said, "I am either going to put you with Dr. Lester up there, or else I am going to hurt you. But if I do that, it will be your own fault."

Bradshaw smiled grimly. "Partner," he said cheerfully, "there are two notches on the butt of my gun, and they represent two men who are probably complaining of the drought at this very moment. Throw up your hands, quick!"

And now that thirty-eight was covering the burly figure of the poacher.

"I am giving you a little license because people don't seem to know how to get shot in this God-forsaken country, but I'll surely kill you in a minute," cried Bradshaw again.

He was indeed right when he said that English people did not understand getting shot. Leigh did not realize the peril of a pistol pointed at him by a man who meant to shoot, and he ran forward like a bull. Bradshaw, cool as ice, took a quiet aim at his antagonist's body. He was going to hit him in the solar plexus — that spot beloved of the prize-fighter. If you hit a man there he goes down, and in addition there is always the pleasing possibility of cutting his spine in two. And so Bradshaw pulled the trigger of his pistol. The hammer dropped, but

no report followed. He pulled the trigger again, but the hammer did not answer.

That beautiful thirty-eight "gun," which had faithfully killed two men, had gone out of order at one of the most crucial moments of his life.

Bradshaw dodged away alertly, still pulling the trigger in desperation, though he knew well that it was hopeless to expect any result. Then he flung the useless weapon at his adversary and bolted.

It was not a retreat, but merely a strategic retirement. He could see clearly that he must be worsted in a hand-to-hand fight with the gigantic poacher, and he was looking around for some weapon with which to equalize matters a little. He lighted presently on a gnarled stick, a fair enough cudgel, and returned to the fray with set teeth. Leigh sent the disabled revolver spinning through the air to him, and greeted this new attack with a burst of bucolic laughter.

"Don't do it, maister," he cried. "You're a rare plucked 'un, but there's nobody on all the border that can stand against me, old as I am."

"Isn't there?" said Bradshaw, dangerously calm. "I don't belong here. The only border I know is the Mexican border, and down there we see things through to a finish."

He was still advancing, and Leigh, realizing that in the matter of activity he was at a serious disad-

vantage, stood firm, watching for an opening. He began to understand that this lean, wiry young man was a formidable antagonist.

Still Bradshaw came on, so slowly that the suspense became wearing — ten feet, nine feet, only six feet.

"Look here, sir," — began the poacher,

Bradshaw sprang forward, his stick uplifted to strike. It was just the sort of foolishness Leigh looked for, and, while one arm went up like a flash to ward the blow, the other was swung forward to clutch the American in a grip that would hold him helpless as a child.

But the blow did not fall as Leigh expected. The heavy stick swished through the air, but the parrying arm was untouched, and an instant afterward Leigh was rolling on the ground in uncontrollable agony from the swift stroke that had fallen on his knee-cap.

As Bradshaw explained afterward, there was no "fair fight" nonsense about him. He knew that in a moment Leigh would be up again, envenomed by his sufferings, and for that reason more formidable than ever. So he coolly stepped over the prostrate man and dealt him a vicious blow on the head, not extremely particular whether it might prove fatal or not.

"I guess, partner, you've miscalculated on borders, this trip," he muttered, looking at his fallen

foe, from whose head there ran an ugly trickle of blood. "And now for Lester."

He strode into the house and instinctively made his way to the upper rooms, coming at length to a locked door.

"Lester!" he shouted: "Lester!"

There was no answer.

"Good Lord! They've wiped him out! I must go and see if that old border champion has the key."

He went down again, and, to his surprise, found Leigh sitting up and rubbing his head, a little dazed, but apparently not much the worse for his injuries. Bradshaw was frankly afraid even now of this man with the sinister face and enormous chest development, but he went up to him with all the arrogance of a conqueror.

"Now, then," he said, sharply, "Where is Dr. Lester? No, no, sit quiet, my friend, or this time I'll kill you for keeps!"

Leigh was thoroughly cowed. He had not forgotten that merciless blow, dealt him when he lay helpless on the ground. This slightly built man, with the thin mouth and unflinching eyes, was a revelation to him.

"Don't be hard on a poor chap," he whined. "The doctor is up-stairs, as well as you are. I'd just taken him a bit of grub when you came."

"You're a liar!" was Bradshaw's uncompromis-

ing retort. "I've shouted myself hoarse without obtaining any reply."

Leigh almost chuckled.

"By gum!" he cried, "I told Maister Warren the doctor was a real gentleman! He gave his word he wouldn't utter a sound if we didn't gag him, and I trusted him."

"Here," said Bradshaw, "go up ahead of me and let him out. No nonsense, mind, or I'll brain you."

Thus politely adjured, Leigh led the way to Lester's prison-room, and in a minute rescued and rescuer were clasping hands.

"Why in thunder didn't you answer when I called just now?" asked Bradshaw.

"I could not," answered Lester, simply. "I had given my word."

"Say," exclaimed his rescuer with some disgust, "you are too good to be true. However, it's all right now, and the sooner I restore you to your sorrowing friends the better. Do you know that Miss Holt is worrying about you just a million times more than you deserve?"

"Miss Holt?"

"Yes, of course, Miss Holt. But come along — you can ride behind me on my horse — and tell me about things on the way. As for you, my friend," to Leigh, "I guess the British policeman will get hold of you whenever you are wanted."

"I give up, sir," said Leigh, calmly. "I saw Mr. Warren knock the old gent on the head, and he's been bribing me ever since to keep quiet. But I've got the books he did it for, and I'm ready to hand them over whenever they're wanted."

"I have settled all that," interposed Bradshaw. "I suspected you directly Dr. Lester disappeared, and by this time Detective Hobson has been through your place with a search-warrant. Anyway, you can vamoose now; but if you take my advice you will stay and face the music."

Lester and Bradshaw mounted the horse and left Leigh to consider the situation. Their mount was a fine up-standing animal, and entirely capable of carrying double weight for at least a fair portion of the journey. Luckily, however, they fell in with a farmer driving into the village when they reached the road, and so Lester was given a lift.

Bradshaw was naturally eager for details of the kidnapping of Lester, but, strangely enough, the subject seemed utterly uninteresting to the young doctor, who kept delicately engineering the conversation round to Edith. What he heard filled his heart with happiness. Edith was true, after all! And then came the despairing thought — would she forgive him?

Phyllis was right. Lester was going to be abject, indeed.

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. WARREN IS SURPRISED

Detective-Inspector Hobson fidgeted up and down the broad drive leading to Arncliffe Hall. True to his instincts, he lurked more or less among the bordering bushes. To do him justice, he acted so that he could see without being seen. That humiliating experience with Leigh had not been lost upon him.

But, when he caught sight of Lester and Bradshaw approaching the Hall there was no necessity for concealment; so he ran out and waved them a triumphant greeting. "I've got him!" he cried. "I've got him!"

"Got whom?" asked Bradshaw, as they came up. "Have you tracked the fell mare of night to her nest at last?"

"Oh, you may chaff, sir," cried Hobson, cheerily. "Anyway, I have laid by the heels the man who knocked Mr. Aingier on the head, and I think I have got hold of the man who murdered Lord Arncliffe. He is one and the same person — Mr. Harry Warren; and if Harry Warren does not stretch a rope pretty soon you may call me an idiot!"

"But," said Bradshaw, mildly, "I have called you an idiot all the time. No doubt you are right about Warren; at the same time, if you are so sure of your man, I want to know why in thunder you cast suspicion on Miss Holt?"

Hobson smiled in what he thought to be a superior manner. "My dear sir," he said, with a touch of condescension, "you don't understand the methods of the force. I simply pretended to suspect Miss Holt in order to throw Warren off his guard."

"Then you always believed him to be the real culprit?"

"I never had a doubt from the first. The trouble was that I hadn't a scrap of evidence to act upon."

"Hobson," said the American, earnestly, "you are wasted in an effete country like this. Come with me to New York. I'm a big man there — bigger than you'd guess — and I'll guarantee you'll be bossing police headquarters inside of six months."

"But," murmured the other, deprecatingly, "wouldn't the appointment of a foreigner like me cause a lot of jealousy?"

"Foreigner! My dear Hobson, an artistic perverter of the truth like you cannot selfishly be claimed by any one country. He belongs to humanity."

The detective's inordinate vanity so often led him into the traps prepared for him by Bradshaw that

he had ceased to acknowledge compliments of the sort with anything more than a sickly smile.

"Never mind, Sherlock," continued the New Yorker, patting him on the shoulder. "I once met an easier mark than you — in Sacramento about ten years ago. Tell us how you got on."

"Splendidly, sir," answered Hobson, glad of an opportunity to show himself in a favorable light. "I obtained a search-warrant and went to Leigh's cottage — accompanied, I don't mind telling you, by P. C. Fox, who is as strong as a bull, for that poacher would be a deuced nasty customer to tackle."

"Easy!" cried Bradshaw, complacently. "Dead easy!"

He intended presently to allow the full details of his battle with Leigh to be dragged from him.

"However, there was no need to produce the warrant," went on Hobson. "There was no one in the place excepting an old woman who might have been a hundred. And she was as dead as a door-nail!"

"What I expected," interposed Lester. "I might have staved it off for a time, but when I told Leigh my opinion he thought I was working for my own ends, and would not believe me."

"Well, gentlemen, we made a quick search. There was not much furniture in the place, yet

nothing turned up at first. There was an old iron-bound box, and in it, if you'll believe me, we found a stocking with nearly a hundred pounds, some of the money dating back to George III."

"Of course," said Bradshaw, with a little cough, "P. C. Fox, as your subordinate, cannot expect to share —"

"Oh, do let him tell his story, there's a good chap," interrupted Lester, earnestly. "This is a serious matter, and considering what it means to Miss Holt —"

Bradshaw shrugged his shoulders. "If I can't infuse innocent joy into the proceedings, I'll dry up," he said. "Proceed, Vidocq."

"So," continued the detective, "we moved the poor old woman eventually, and searched the bed. And there we found what we were looking for — Lord Arncliffe's private account-book, and his pass-book as well. Although the items in the private book had all been checked, they did not tally with the pass-book in dozens of cases. I should judge, speaking roughly, that there is a defalcation of at least three thousand pounds."

"But how does that incriminate Warren?" asked Bradshaw, aware that the detective was unaware of Lester's exciting adventure, and wondering how Hobson had reached his conclusions.

"Wait a minute, sir. I telephoned the bank at

Alnwick, and learnt that Warren had a small account there. And from the day he opened it, he has never once sent in his pass-book to be made up."

Lester, thinking abstractedly of Edith, had scarcely assimilated half the conversation, but he dropped in a question. "What do you gather from that?"

"Well, sir," replied Hobson, with the dignity of the man who has "arrived," as the French say, "I can't bring myself to call people 'fools,' and 'idiots,' and 'beasts,' like some others I could mention. But, if I wanted to be rude, I should say any one was very dense who could not realize how Warren had robbed Lord Arncliffe and kept things going with a false pass-book."

"You've hit it, Hobson," agreed the American, heartily, "and I take back all I've said — I didn't mean five per cent. of it, anyway. Just listen to this," and he ran rapidly over the details of Lester's kidnapping and subsequent rescue. "Now, where is Warren? Have you got him in the calaboose?"

"So far as I know, sir, he is down in the village, visiting the various public-houses. When I said I had laid him by the heels, I did not mean that I had actually arrested him. But it will come before the day is out, and nothing will be lost by a little delay. Meanwhile, Fox is shadowing him, and if he attempts to escape, he will be arrested at once. What

I want to do is to net his mother, too, as an accessory after the fact."

"But this is simply outrageous!" exclaimed Lester, indignantly. "Do you think any judge in the land will sentence a mother for endeavoring to shield her son?"

Hobson ceded the point for the moment. He had a theory which he had mentioned to none. It would not be his fault if the Arncliffe puzzle did not attract widespread attention in its ultimate solution.

Bradshaw, by the grace of Miss Phyllis Harland, having little, now, save a friendly interest in Edith, had made Lester happy, were it not for the haunting fear that he had offended his divinity beyond forgiveness. Lester had never learned the golden rule that no one should fall in love for the first time. And so, when he found himself almost in the presence of his lady he sheltered himself behind an armor of icy reserve, after the manner of his caste.

"Wait here," said Bradshaw, as they entered the library. "I won't be a minute."

Lester, left to himself, glanced out over the broad acres of Arncliffe, and the sight of the rolling meadows and noble woods brought back to him all the old question of disparity. Before, at least, she was under a cloud, and he could offer her something of protection. But now —

So he built up a harrowing picture of himself dying in an African swamp with her dear name upon his lips, and in the midst of this pleasing reverie, which lasted for perhaps ten minutes, he was interrupted by the voice of Bradshaw.

"There you are, Miss Holt. Behold him, safe and sound! Had a nasty smack on the head, but I understand the great British people have remarkably thick skulls. Good-by! I'll see you later."

Edith, lured into the room on utterly false pretenses, stood spellbound at the sight of the man in whose behalf she had been suffering agonies of anxiety.

Lester, taken off his guard, bowed stiffly. "How d'ye do?" he said.

"Oh — how do you do? answered Edith, with equal formality. She felt something of the instinct which prompts a mother to slap her child because he has just escaped being run over. She eyed him, too, surreptitiously, and was indignant to see that he looked well and strong as ever.

Lester stole a glance at her. The little red-gold head was poised haughtily, and the scarlet flower of a mouth was shut tightly as a poppy, at nightfall. And lo! as Miss Phyllis predicted, Dr. Lester became abject.

"Edith," he began.

"Dr. Lester!"

"I was jealous," he said. "Oh, my dearest, forgive me: I was jealous!"

"Jealous?" exclaimed Edith, with scornful indignation. "I am not a housemaid, Dr. Lester, to 'walk out' with this man to-day and that to-morrow. I am glad I have learned in good time the sort of estimation in which you hold me."

"In time!"

"Yes, in time. Jealous!"

"Well," said he, miserably, "Mr. Aingier unfortunately chanced to tell me it would be an ideal way of settling the difficulty about Lord Arncliffe's money; and Bradshaw had your arm in his, and — and — you were laughing."

"Terrible crimes! I gave my arm to a man who was ill — and I was laughing! I won't detain you any longer, Dr. Lester." She moved toward the door with graceful dignity.

With hopeless despair in his eyes, he stepped forward mechanically to open it for her. Then, by instinct, he did what he ought to have done at the beginning of the interview — he took her in his arms, resist she never so strenuously, kissed the determined little mouth until it quivered into weakness and her cheeks challenged its scarlet.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh! Please!"

"My little girl!"

"But I don't love you any more!" emphasizing the fact by slipping a soft arm round his neck.

"Have you forgiven me, darling?"

"Perhaps I have," in a whisper.

"Then kiss me all by yourself."

Bradshaw, coughing to an extent that was entirely uncalled for, and apparently in serious difficulties with the door-handle, entered the room.

"Sorry to interrupt you," he said, looking mercilessly at Edith's rosy cheeks, "but Hobson is anxious to see you both in the main hall. I told you, Miss Holt, to expect developments, and although any sort of scene must be unpleasant for you, I am sure you will welcome anything which puts an end to the strain of the past few weeks. Moreover, I have a little surprise of my own for you."

"I shall indeed welcome an end to all these bewilderments and outrages," was the reply. "I hope, however, that your suprise will be a pleasant one?"

"Pretty good, I think."

In one of the corridors they encountered Mrs. Warren, and it seemed to Bradshaw that for a fraction of a second her cheeks paled at the sight of Lester. But her step remained so firm and her voice so unbroken that he told himself he must be mistaken.

"Good day, Dr. Lester," she said. "I am glad to see you safe and well. We were beginning to

fear that you were fated to add another to the mysteries of Arncliffe." She passed on, with a jingle of her keys.

Bradshaw looked after her curiously. "Have you talked to Mrs. Warren about Lester's disappearance?" he asked Edith.

"Certainly not."

"Ah!" he said to himself, "a slip! She knows the whole business. Well, I am sorry for the poor woman."

Arncliffe Hall was so extensive that ere they had covered half their journey Edith was asking Bradshaw coaxingly what his surprise was.

"Patience is a virtue," he said, with a smile. But he broke out: "You won't have to wait. Here comes the surprise, right in front of you!"

Edith looked up, and then, with a shriek of "Reggie!" flung herself into the arms of a handsome youth, kissing him with a delighted abandon which made Lester's blood run cold, until the likeness helped him to realize that this was the brother whom Edith held so dear.

"You dear, bad boy! Why didn't you let me know? Did you receive my letter? Of course not. There has not been time. Why did you come?" And she asked so many questions in a breath that the newcomer had no chance to answer a single one of them.

"Cabled him to come over," explained Bradshaw, tersely, when order was at length restored.

"But how did *you* know?" asked Edith in utter atsonishment.

"Clerk in my office. He used to talk so much about the place in England where his sister lived that he riled every free-born American in the place. Said it knocked spots out of the Central Park — which it does, for a fact. Anyway, I heard him mention as a coincidence with my name that Lord Arncliffe was originally Sir William Bradshaw, and that is really the chance which led to my coming here."

"I am so glad Reggie was in your office," said Edith. "I understood he was employed by one of those horrid trusts."

"The fact is, Miss Holt," confessed the American, "I am a 'horrid Trust.' Amalgamated Lumber — that's me."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Lester, "that you are Bradshaw the millionaire? Why, I thought he was a middle-aged man."

"Well, I am middle-aged — for the States."

"And do you force other people to sell their businesses to you or else crush them?" asked Edith, reproachfully.

"Sure," answered Bradshaw, cheerfully. "That's part of the game. And if you'll believe me, Miss

Holt, I have a list of the widows and orphans I have despoiled brought up to me every morning before breakfast. It amuses me, and keeps me from becoming a dyspeptic, like other masters of the art."

He said this so solemnly that Edith, a little bewildered by the events of the past quarter of an hour, looked at him doubtfully. Then she saw light. "But you would not take any of Lord Arncliffe's money," she cried triumphantly.

"Why no, I don't value any money unless I earn it. And, to tell you the truth, I have rather more than I know what to do with, anyway. If you like, I will give a free library to Arncliffe. Or," he added, "if Dr. Lester intends to practise here I might endow a cemetery."

"You are a horrid man," cried Edith with mock indignation, "and I am glad Reggie won't be under your influence any longer."

"Why," exclaimed young Holt, aghast, "you are not going to get rid of me, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"It is not that," interrupted Edith. "Of course you cannot remain a clerk under present circumstances. If you would like to go into the army —"

"The army!" cried Reggie, with an emphatic sniff, for he had imbibed much of the American spirit in a short period. "I mean to work, and I

am going back to New York just as soon as you are comfortably fixed."

And later Edith realized that her brother was right. Only in strenuous endeavor lay redemption of the past and salvation for the future.

Mr. and Mrs. Aingier were sitting in a windowed recess in the entrance hall listening to the seemingly artless prattle of Miss Harland, when Edith and the rest came up. Lester and Phyllis had not, of course, met. Indeed, he was unaware of her presence at the Hall — and hence he naturally regarded the dainty little beauty with some curiosity.

Phyllis also was interested in the man who had caused her bosom friend so many heartburnings.

"Just as I said!" she commented to herself. "A nasty square jaw and a mouth like a rat-trap. I should like to punish him."

Phyllis had only one way of punishing a man. To Bradshaw's unutterable indignation, she left her hand in Lester's for a full ten seconds, gazing up at him the while with big trustful eyes that had in them a suspicion of naive admiration. Men are only human, and Lester regarded this welcome as a natural tribute to his manly excellence.

Meanwhile Edith lost no detail of the pretty little scene. Perhaps the ultimate results of Miss Harland's flirtatious habits might have been disastrous

but for the intervention of lucky chance. After giving Lester a full discharge from her optical battery, Phyllis averted her eyes in shy confusion, as was her usual custom, and the first person they fell upon was Bradshaw.

Good gracious! His jaw was square too, and if Lester's mouth was like a rat-trap it seemed to her terrified imagination that here was a trap equal to holding a lion. William Lincoln Bradshaw was madly in love. In days to come he would, if his fortunes changed, toil unceasingly in the inferno of New York's climate for the dollars his wife would fritter away at Paris or Monte Carlo. But he would stand no nonsense, now or then.

Thus it was that presently, when they stood a little apart from the rest, he spoke to her. No word of love had passed between them, but there was no need for explanations. "Say," he said quietly, "I won't have it."

Phyllis had a tear which she had managed to keep unshed through many desperate encounters, and now she summoned it up. But the granite mouth remained unmoved. That tear had never failed Phyllis yet, and she began to feel frightened.

"I did not mean anything," she faltered, not even attempting to deny the unspoken charge. And lo! the tear fell, a pearl of price, splashing itself into diamonds which cost Bradshaw two thousand

pounds in sterling money, just as quickly as a jeweler could be summoned from London.

So it was evident that in their new-found happiness, Edith and Lester had, like their friends, forgotten the shadow of tragedy which still draped Arncliffe Hall in somber hues.

CHAPTER XXII

THE EXPIATION

One person, however, had not forgotten it. At the farther end of the spacious entrance hall Detective Hobson was watching the drive expectantly. It was no part of his plan that Warren should meet Leigh and thus learn of Lester's rescue. So he sent Wilson to find the agent, with a message that Mrs. Warren wished to see him immediately. Hobson caught the sound of distant wheels, and his face brightened. Then, at length, a dog-cart came into view, driven in Warren's usual furious style. That was enough for the detective. He walked up to Lester and Bradshaw, drawing them aside for a moment, and then he led them onward and out on to the drive.

He hailed Warren, who pulled up his steaming horse.

"Oh, Mr. Warren," said the detective, genially, "your mother has been asking for you everywhere. I saw her inside there a moment ago."

Warren beckoned to a gardener's boy. "Here, take the cart to the stables," he said, striding toward

the door which the detective had purposely left open.

Hobson followed close at his heels. Shutting the door before the waiting footman could intervene, he touched his quarry smartly on the shoulder. "I want you, Warren," he said with an ominous change in the tone and manner of his address.

Warren turned and put up his hands with the sheer instinct of self-defense. It was what Hobson wanted. The young agent, scarcely yet realizing the dread truth, found himself securely handcuffed after a brief struggle.

The two girls started apart, each clinging instinctively to the man of her heart. It was Hobson's great moment, and he made the most of it.

"Harry Warren," he said in a loud, clear voice, "I arrest you for the murder of Lord Arncliffe and the attempted murder of Thomas Aingier. I warn you that anything you may say will be taken down in writing and used in evidence against you."

For a moment Warren became blind with terror, but that and all other emotions gave place to the sense of shame at standing there manacled before women — before Edith, whom, in his way, he loved. And so he hung his head and stood silent, until a strangled sob made him look up. It came from Edith, who had caught sight of Mrs. Warren standing like a statue at the foot of the staircase.

The old housekeeper was so ghost white that the very sight of her brought a tightening of the heart. Warren laughed hysterically when he saw his mother and he turned to Hobson with an air of bravado.

"All right!" he said gruffly, "I confess the whole business. I poisoned Lord Arncliffe and I attacked Mr. Aingier to obtain possession of the books which showed my defalcations. Sorry, Mr. Aingier, but 'needs must when the devil drives' — you know. Now, is that sufficient, or am I to be kept here any longer to amuse the company and torture a poor old woman?"

"Yes," broke in Lester, always generous. "This is infamous, Hobson. "You might very well have arrested Mr. Warren privately. In fact, I understood —"

"You will please allow me to carry out my business in my own way, Dr. Lester," said the police officer, with a certain stern dignity. "I represent the crown now, and I will not allow you or anybody else to interfere with me in the execution of my duties."

While this unexpected altercation was taking place Mrs. Warren came forward slowly, with the firm step and impassive face of a woman born to command.

"It is all over, mother," muttered Warren, hurriedly. "I have confessed to the murder of Lord

Arncliffe and everything else, so the less said the better."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Harry," she answered, a gleam of the wonderful mother-love coming for a fleeting instant into her calm eyes. "You were always a loving son, whatever else you have been. But this farce must stop before it becomes a tragedy."

"Not another word, mother!" growled Warren, almost brutally. "Don't listen to her," he shouted in a frenzy, raising his manacled hands in entreaty. He almost flung himself on Hobson. "Take me away, d—n you. Why are you keeping me here?" he bellowed again.

Mrs. Warren silenced him with a pitiful gesture.

"No, my boy," she murmured. "At the best, I could look forward to only a few more years, while you, even if they imprison you, may yet enjoy something of life. Gentlemen, it was I who poisoned Lord Arncliffe!"

Mrs. Aingier and the two girls looked at the stately housekeeper in wondering horror, but the old solicitor, learned in the ways of the world, shook his head.

"What a miraculous thing is that maternal love which lasts from the cradle to the grave!" he whispered to Lester. "But it will not save her son, poor woman."

Hobson, however, seemed to be of a different

opinion. "I quite believe you, madam," he said. "But do you understand the consequences of such a confession?"

"Perfectly," replied Mrs. Warren, quietly. "I make the statement of my own free will, and I am prepared to give proofs of all I say. There," she said, laying a bundle of letters on the table, "are papers which will bear me out, and here is the bottle which contained the poison I administered to Lord Arncliffe, together with a description, in his lordship's own handwriting, of the nature and action of the poison. He had forgotten it, or he would surely have mentioned it in the codicil to his will."

She handed Hobson a quaint old Venetian flask as she spoke. It was iridescent with age, and as the rainbow gleams caught Bradshaw's eye the American started forward.

"Why," he cried, "that was the thing I saw from the tree!"

"So it was you?" said Mrs. Warren, curiously unemotional. "I rather suspected it. I ought to have killed you."

Harry Warren had broken down now. He was sobbing like an overgrown child, but his grief was so plainly in his mother's behalf that none could feel anything except pity for him. Mrs. Warren glanced at her son, but she obviously nerved herself to continue.

"Let us reach the end," she cried imperiously. "I killed Lord Arncliffe because I was afraid he would discover my son's defalcations, and I knew that from him no mercy was to be expected. Most people have regarded Lord Arncliffe as the famous philanthropist, the benefactor of his species. To me he was an unrelenting and inveterate enemy."

She paused, and seemed to sway a little, but she waved aside the chair which Lester offered her.

"Forty years ago," she went on, "William Bradshaw and I were engaged to be married. Then I met Harry Warren, and, although Mr. Bradshaw was even then wealthy, I gave up riches for poverty and married the man I loved. I never regretted it, and my discarded lover never forgave me. When my husband died, fifteen years after our marriage, I was left destitute, with a baby three years old dependent upon me. It was then that Lord Arncliffe asked me to come and see him. As he was an invalid at the time, I thought," and her features yielded to bitter memory for an instant, "he intended to renew his old proposal. For my son's sake, I was prepared to accept it, but I soon learnt that he merely required a housekeeper — some one to look after his servants and see that his table was kept creditably.

"I was glad! A competence was forthcoming, and I had my son at my side. And I was free to

live with the undimmed memory of my dear husband! Then Lord Arncliffe began a system of petty persecution. He always treated me with the most scrupulous respect, but he never lost any opportunity of pointing out how different my position might have been. I endured it for my child's sake, and I cultivated a calm indifference which has made me more like a sphinx than a living woman. His hatred was unwavering. I nearly killed him once before. My husband, God help him! was given to drink. It was his only failing, and I found Lord Arncliffe — Lord Arncliffe, the advocate of temperance! — giving wine to my boy of ten!"

"But tell me, Mrs. Warren," interposed Lester, who, like the others, was watching her narrowly, and whose professional instinct was aroused, "what was the poison you gave Lord Arncliffe?"

"I found it in a secret drawer, there," said she, feebly indicating a Florentine cabinet at the head of the stairs. "The secret drawer had warped a little, and when I opened it I found an old bottle and some directions, written by Lord Arncliffe himself, many years earlier. It said that five drops a day would kill a man in a month; ten drops a day in a fortnight; twenty in a week, and so on. I had a special reason for hastening the end, so I gave Lord Arncliffe five drops daily, and he died exactly in the month. I think he guessed the truth — I hope he did!"

Lester picked up Lord Arncliffe's paper. "'*Acqua Tofana*'" he read aloud; "Manna of St. Nicholas! Good Heavens! To think that it duped me and Mathieson! Is there any left, Mrs. Warren?" he demanded, with a fresh anxiety which communicated a thrill to the listeners.

"No," was the answer, given faintly, and with something of a ghastly smile. "I took all that remained an hour ago when I knew that you had escaped from Leigh and my son. And I think," she confessed, with a little gasp, "I have only about five minutes of life left."

Lester knew, then, that he had not been mistaken when he saw death in the unfortunate woman's face.

"Take the ladies away at once," he whispered to Bradshaw.

Mrs. Aingier was only too anxious to quit the room, and butterfly Phyllis needed no entreating; but Edith put a tender arm round Mrs. Warren and drew her to an armchair.

"Oh, how could you have done it!" she whispered tearfully. "How could you? Yet I am so sorry for you, Mrs. Warren!"

"You are a good girl, Edith," said the dying woman with a wan smile. "Don't be too hard on my boy!"

"They shall not do anything to him," promised Edith. "He shall go to the Colonies and make a

fresh start. I am sure he will become a good man for your sake."

Lester, oblivious to all other considerations, was listening to Mrs. Warren's heart with his stethoscope, and endeavoring to slap some life into her icy hands, while she, conscious of the futility of resistance, submitted passively.

"Brandy and hot-water bottles, quick!" he cried to Edith, with full faith in her powers of self-control. "And you had better have a bed prepared with hot blankets."

Mrs. Warren lifted a weak, restraining hand. "Please do not torture me any more, Dr. Lester," she pleaded. "You must see that it is only a matter of minutes. If you want to do me a real kindness, let me speak my last words to my son."

Lester, indeed, knew that she was right, but it is only natural that a doctor should think he has achieved a triumph if he keeps some poor wretch gasping in agony for a few hours longer than nature has seemingly ordained. Now, however, he walked over to Hobson and his prisoner.

"Take those off!" he said curtly, pointing to the handcuffs.

The detective hesitated a moment, but even his calloused heart was touched, and he slipped the fetters from Warren's wrists.

"You are on your honor," he whispered, and

the unfortunate young man, even in the agony of the moment, was grateful for the words as well as for the action.

Warren laid his head on his mother's lap as might a frightened child, and she tried to caress it with a palsied hand.

"Be a good boy in future, dear. Always be a good boy, whatever happens," she whispered.

"I will. But mother! Oh, mother!"

"Always a good boy!"

And so he sobbed his protests and promises, until presently Lester led the poor, headstrong victim of heredity and of a calculated vengeance gently away; for Mrs. Warren had gone where God would judge between her and Lord Arncliffe.

Next morning, when Inspector Hobson was about to convey Harry Warren to the jail at Alnwick, Edith called a general council.

"Now, I want you all to help," she began, with true feminine directness. "What is to be done about Harry Warren? He must not be punished any more."

The man from Scotland Yard was in authority now, and he did not shirk his task.

"I am afraid it cannot be avoided, Miss Holt," he said. "Regarding the murder of Lord Arncliffe, he will have to stand his trial as an accessory after the fact. I don't think, in view of Mrs. Warren's

statement and the papers she left, that the police will charge him with anything more, and, in case of a mother and son, he will get off with next to nothing. Of course, there are the three other charges — the robbing of Lord Arncliffe, and the attacks on Mr. Aingier and Dr. Lester. However, if those are dropped, I do not suppose the public prosecutor will take them up."

"Well, Dr. Lester is not going to take any proceedings, and I am sure Mr. Aingier will not."

"Why, my dear," said the old lawyer, mildly, "the young rascal hit me a very severe blow on the head, and the place is exceedingly tender. Still, if you wish it —"

"I am sure," interrupted Mrs. Aingier, who had not slept all night, "I do not want to be vindictive or unchristian, but my dear husband might have been killed, and I really feel that Warren deserves some little punishment. Fifteen or twenty years' penal servitude —"

"I think, Mrs. Aingier," interposed Edith with a slight accession of the marquise manner, "you owe me some reparation for the manner in which you behaved toward me. Certainly, no one who disobliges me now in this matter can again become or remain my friend."

"Oh, very well," sighed the lawyer's wife, "but don't blame me if we are all murdered in our beds."

"Very well, miss," said Hobson. "You need not have any further anxiety in the matter. What is wanted is a little influence, and, considering what an old friend Mr. Aingier is of the treasury solicitor, I do not think influence will be lacking."

Aingier, thus attacked, had to admit that he was not without power in certain quarters.

And it may here be said that Harry Warren was acquitted, there being no direct evidence that he was aware of his mother's crime. Edith's liberality gave him every chance of making a fresh start in the world. When he bade Lester, ever kindly and generous, good-by at Liverpool, he unquestionably quitted Britain with the intention of living a clean, honest life in the future.

Respecting Lord Arncliffe's legacy of ten thousand pounds for the discovery of his murderer, Hobson pointed out that from the first he had suspected Mrs. Warren to be the guilty party, and he arrested her son in such a dramatic manner only to force a confession from her lips; but Edith, having discretionary powers, awarded half the money to him and half to Wilson and May Mannering on their marriage. The detective proved his statement, but even he could not deny that the true dénouement came with the rescue of Lester. Further, Edith was convinced that the fortunate accident of May Mannering seeing something unusual in

Warren's dog-cart alone saved her lover from all sorts of horrible fates.

Twilight was just falling over the wide expanse of the park as Edith and Lester sat on the balcony at Arncliffe. It was, of course, a secluded part of the balcony, and therefore their conversation mainly consisted of the "soft nothings" which mean so much. From the garden came occasional peals of merry laughter. Phyllis and Bradshaw were an altogether more lively pair of lovers than their friends.

"Dear Phyllis!" murmured Edith. "She is a warm-hearted little darling, but I really think she has secured the only man in the world who could manage her. I wanted to ask you something, George. Would you mind if I settled a large sum of money on Phyllis? Lord Arncliffe's fortune is so great that we can well spare it."

"My dear one, it is your own money; but I think your idea is creditable to your bright little head. Bradshaw cannot very well veto a proposal of that sort, and he is certainly entitled to some share of his uncle's money."

"You are a darling!" said Edith. And, as Lester put it, she "kissed him all by herself."

"Dearest," he whispered, "would you mind disposing of a large number of other bequests instantly and submit them for my approval on the same terms?"